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First semester freshmen college dropouts : a family system perspective.

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FIRST SEMESTER FRESHMEN COLLEGE DROPOUTS:

A FAMILY SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation Presented

By

RICHARD ALVA WHITING

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1980

Education



Richard Alva Whiting

1980

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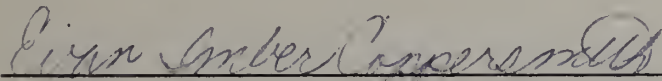
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A Dissertation Presented

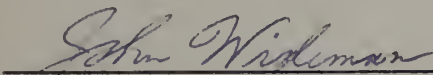
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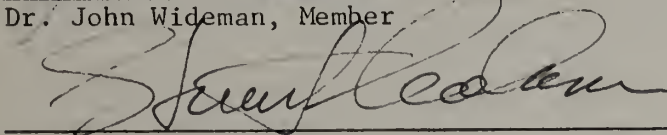
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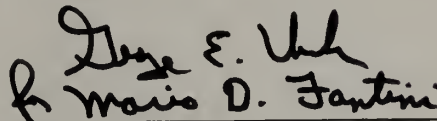
Dr. Evan Imber Coppersmith, Chairperson of Committee



Dr. John Wideman, Member



Dr. Stuart Golann, Member



Mario Fantini, Dean
School of Education

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Louise, whose love, support, sacrifice, and typing made it all possible. What you gave will be cherished forever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the many "families" who supported me through this venture. Much appreciation goes to the families who generously provided the interactional data for this study.

I am very grateful to the family of friends at the University, especially Janine, who helped make the doctoral program the highlight of my formal education. Dr. Ron Frederickson deserves credit for helping me clarify my dissertation topic and to the committee members, Dr. Jack Wideman and Dr. Stuart Golann, thank you for challenging and supporting me. Dr. Evan Imber Coppersmith, the committee chairperson, deserves special thanks for being who she is.

I deeply appreciate the members of the Springfield College family who overextended themselves during the past three years to make this dream possible; thanks to Jack, Bill, John, Chris, Marge, Joan, Linda, Kathy, Gerri, Glen, Dave, Bruce, Ruth, and Carolyn.

Finally, my parents deserve credit for teaching me the value of endurance, and, to my special family, Louise, Clay, and Bryce, I'm looking forward to playing again.

ABSTRACT

First Semester Freshmen College Dropouts:

A Family System Perspective

May 1980

Richard A. Whiting, B.A., Springfield College

M.S., Springfield College

C.A.S., Springfield College

Ed.D., University of Massachusetts

Directed By: Dr. Evan Imber Coppersmith

The purpose of this study was to investigate, by means of a structural assessment, the nature of the family system of first semester freshmen students who dropped out of Springfield College. In conceptualizing the family as a system, family therapy theory postulates that problematic behavior does not rest within the intrapsychic domain, but in the interactional context of the family system. Viewing first semester freshmen college dropouts from a family systems perspective was the theoretical underpinning of this study.

Six families were presented in separate case studies in this investigation. The interactional patterns, demonstrated in a conjoint family interview, provided the data for analysis. Immediately following the interview, the researcher completed a structural assessment of the family. After the researcher completed the first structural assessment, a research assistant developed an independent structural

assessment based upon observations gained from viewing the videotaped interview. After the research assistant completed the second structural assessment, the researcher viewed the videotaped interview and independently completed the third structural assessment. Excerpts of the interview, which reflected the family's interactional patterns, were included in this assessment.

The data from the structural assessments was examined to discern the patterns of interpersonal transactions in the dropout families, paying particular attention to the families' enmeshment and the nature of the triadic relationship involving the student and his/her parents. Clearly, the interactional patterns of the interviewed families were characteristic of enmeshment. This observation was supported, unequivocally, in all of the structural assessments. In a variety of ways, enmeshment was demonstrated repeatedly in these families as the diffuse boundaries enabled members to speak for each other, intrude into each other's conversations, and speak simultaneously. Frequently, family members spoke with assumed expertise about each other and a sense of similarity existed among members. In the service of family loyalty and closeness, members had difficulty differentiating themselves from their family as they sacrificed their own autonomy. Five of the six families demonstrated interactional patterns which supported a skewed family hierarchy as the system enabled the dropout student to interact, inappropriately, in the executive subsystem.

The nature of the triadic relationship between the dropout and his/her parents was impossible to assess directly because of the

absence of fathers in most of the families. In the one family where the spouse subsystem was intact, the husband was unable to get off from work to attend the interview. The remaining five families were single parent families, four as a result of either divorce or separation and one as a result of the husband's death. Some of the families offered interactional data which enabled the researcher to speculate about the existence of the conflict defusing interactional patterns of triangulation, parent-child coalition, and detouring.

Though the researcher was unable to assess directly these three specific patterns of conflict defusing behavior, the families demonstrated interactional patterns which indicated that they had a low tolerance for open conflict. This characteristic of enmeshment was shown as members had a difficult time completing dyadic transactions. This was manifest by swift and dramatic changes in conversations and members interrupting and intruding into conversations. Because of an inability to discuss concerns directly with each other, the families were impaired in their ability to develop alternatives to the students dropping out.

All of the structural assessments were consistent in the speculation that dropping out of college was simultaneously maintained by the family system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon. This research investigation, which appeared to be the first reported study of conjoint family interviews with college dropout students, included a review of unanticipated findings as well as specific recommendations for further research.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction: Statement of the Problem and Rationale

This study investigated the family system of six freshmen students who dropped out of Springfield College during the fall semester of 1979. This investigation was accomplished by means of a structural assessment (Minuchin, 1974). It was proposed that a structural assessment of the dropout student and his/her family would offer educators and counselors in higher education a different conceptualization of dropout behavior and possible methods of intervention which might reduce this consistent, predictable phenomenon.

During the past 40 years, several investigations have yielded consistent results regarding the number of students that annually drop out of college (Astin, 1975, 1972; Iffert, 1957; McNeely, 1937; Panos & Astin, 1968, 1967). As Cope (1978) reported:

During the 1980's, more than fifteen million men and women will enter nearly three thousand colleges and universities. Because most of the evidence from natural retention studies conducted over more than four decades yields surprisingly consistent results, it can be expected that five or six million of these students will never earn degrees. About 40 percent of entering freshmen in baccalaureate - granting institutions never achieve a degree, about 40 percent will graduate in the "normal" four years, and the remaining 20 percent will delay their baccalaureate (p. 3).

In the past this information about the numbers of dropouts has led many college presidents, in their initial address to the freshmen

class, to remark jokingly, "Look two people to your left and two to your right. These students will not be here four years from now". It is the opinion of this author that future freshmen classes will not be addressed in this manner. More likely they will hear, "You have chosen to attend this college and we want to help you remain here".

This predicted change in attitude towards wanting to help retain students stems from the fact that currently two very real issues confront higher education, especially the private sector. The first is spiraling costs resulting from inflation. In the last 10 years, 129 private colleges have closed. Also reported in the article Private Colleges Cry Help! (1979) was the prediction that through the 1980's as many as 300 of the 1,500 private colleges in this country will follow suit because of their inability to survive financially. Since private colleges rely heavily on student tuition fees for operating expenses, every student that drops out represents a loss of revenue. At a college like Springfield, where the vast majority of students come from moderate to middle income families, remaining students and their families cannot afford annual tuition increases to make up for the lost income incurred by students dropping out. Repeated tuition increases have the realistic potential of pricing a college out of business. Purely from the perspective of economic survival, it has become practical for college administrators to understand why students drop out and to effect changes which may influence student retention.

The other issue of concern in higher education is the fact that the number of students graduating from high school is declining

steadily and predictably. This reduction in the applicant pool obviously means a reduction in the number of applicants. According to Harvard President Derek Bok (Private Colleges Cry Help!. 1979), "The institutions that closed in the past few years did so without the impact of the decline in enrollment. The decline will provide much more serious pressure on closings in the next generation" (p. 38). By 1991, the current population of 4.3 million 18 year olds will have dropped by 25 percent.

These facts have already motivated some administrators at Springfield College to address the dropout phenomenon. Within the past two years, the Dean of Students' staff developed an exit interview questionnaire to be completed by students who voluntarily terminate their status. An exit interview, where a student's responses to the questionnaire are discussed, is a systemic attempt to examine the reasons why a student may be leaving. It is intended that this information will be used to modify and change problematic areas which are being consistently identified by withdrawing students.

The college president initiated a Task Force on Retention. This committee composed of administrators, faculty members, and students is exploring methods by which the institution may, if indicated, more adequately and appropriately respond to the needs of students. Suggestions to modify the curriculum and refine the academic advising process are two examples of several proposed revisions.

Another suggestion proposed by this writer, the Director of the Counseling Center at Springfield College, was to conjointly interview first semester freshmen students and their families in an attempt to

assess the systemic influences which the student's family may have had on a student's decision to leave Springfield. Conceptualizing the family as a system is the major theoretical perspective in family therapy (Steinglass, 1978). The theoretical shift away from assuming that human problems reside within the intrapsychic to assuming there is a functional and interactional basis for problematic behavior is primary to systems oriented clinicians (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin, Rosman, & Baker, 1978; Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1978; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977). The basic assumption underlying this study was that a student's decision to drop out of college and return home to live was simultaneously maintained by the family system as well as being a family system maintenance phenomenon. Essentially, dropping out was conceptualized as a homeostatic process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate, by means of a structural assessment, the nature of the family system of first semester freshmen students who dropped out of Springfield College. The structural assessment was developed after one conjoint family interview.

The move away from home to college is made every fall by thousands of young men and women and for several years attrition research has focused on a plethora of student characteristics in an attempt to differentiate the persister from the dropout. Regarding the results of attrition research, Cope and Hannah (1975) conclude, "Findings are often contradictory and seldom illuminate the source of difficulty for

either the student or the college" (p. 8).

By completing structural assessments on the families of first semester freshmen dropouts, this researcher studied a problem which had not been investigated from the systems perspective offered by family therapy theory. Though family therapy was suggested for dropouts and their families (Levenson & Kohn, 1965), these authors never reported they conjointly interviewed families. In a telephone conversation with Dr. Levenson on March 20, 1979, he told this researcher that his staff never interviewed or treated families conjointly.

This study was designed to investigate an old problem which had been the cause of growing concern for administrators in higher education. Also, this research would be adding to the literature in the rapidly developing field of family therapy.

Definitions of Terms

1. Alliances: Two or more members of a family who are united around a common interest or task. The issue around which they joined may be a positive task (parental alliance to raise children) or a negative one (mother/son alliance to fight father's authority).
2. Boundaries: The rules in a family defining who participates and in what manner. They also refer to a separating line between individuals (Minuchin, 1974).
3. Conjoint Family Interview: An interview conducted with all available family members.

4. Disengagement: A transactional style of family systems or subsystems in which members tend to be distant, tolerate a wide range of behavior, with rigid boundaries. In disengaged families, family support is activated only after a great deal of stress or conflict (Minuchin, 1974).
5. Detouring: A conflict defusing interactional pattern whereby parental conflicts are submerged as the parents present a united front in either their support or attack against a child (Minuchin et al., 1978).
6. Enmeshment: A transactional style of family systems or subsystems in which members tend to be undifferentiated, overly close, with diffuse boundaries. In enmeshed families, there is a low threshold of tolerance for conflict and a reluctance to change when change is appropriate (Minuchin, 1974).
7. Family Homeostasis: A concept denoting the continuous interplay of dynamic forces within the family tending towards the maintenance of an equilibrium among family members (Jackson, 1957).
8. Family Rules: A concept developed to study typical and repetitive patterns of interactions which characterize the family as more than a collection of individuals (Jackson, 1959).
9. Family Systems Theory: An orientation which conceptualizes the members of a family as elements in a circuit of interaction. It abandons the causal-mechanistic view of

phenomena and replaces it with the view that every family member influences others while, in turn, being influenced by those same members (Palazzoli et al., 1978).

10. Joining: Refers to a collective set of verbal and nonverbal techniques used by a therapist to gain entrance into the family system in a hierarchical position of leadership (Minuchin, 1974).
11. Overinvolvement: A term used to describe an intense relationship in which the responses of each person are exaggeratedly important. The relationship is characterized by a mixture of affection and exasperation (Haley, 1976).
12. Parent-Child Coalition: A conflict defusing interactional pattern whereby a stable alliance exists between one child and one parent against the other parent. For example, transactions would always appear as father and son against mother (Minuchin et al., 1978).
13. Structural Assessment: An analysis or diagnosis of a family's interactions in its current context (see Appendix A) (Minuchin, 1974).
14. Subsystems: Divisions in families determined by the tasks, sex, functions, and/or generations.
15. Triad: Interactions in a family which involve three members, for example, father, mother, and child.
16. Triangulation: An interactional conflict defusing pattern whereby a child is pressed to ally with one parent against the

other. Because the alliance with one parent never stabilizes, the alliances shift. For example, it would appear as father and daughter against mother and, in the next moment, it would appear as mother and daughter against father (Minuchin et al., 1978).

Limitations of the Study

The research function of the case study method was to generate hypotheses and did not lend itself to statistical interpretation (Mouly, 1970).

Some member or members of the dropout's nuclear family were unable to attend the interview.

It was assumed that the students who dropped out had intended to complete their freshmen year when they enrolled in the fall.

Delimitations of the Study

Only freshmen students who withdrew from Springfield College during the fall semester were included in the study.

Only students and family members who were willing and able to participate were included in the study.

The structural assessment was completed after one interview.

The structural assessment was the only method used in analyzing the family system and its patterns of interaction.

C H A P T E R I I

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter is designed to flow from very broad concepts to very specific concepts. It begins with a review of several core concepts which represent the theoretical foundation of general systems theory. These general systems theory concepts, derived from the physical and biological sciences, are then applied to family therapy theory and practice with a major emphasis on structural family therapy. In the last section, there is a review and critique of Levenson's Dropout Clinic Project. This project represents the only reported studies of interviews and treatment of college dropouts and their families. This organizational format is designed to inform and assist the reader's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this research.

General Systems Theory - Origins

Ludwig von Bertalanffy dedicated much of his professional life as a biologist writing, theorizing, and lecturing about principles of organization in living organisms. Von Bertalanffy's (1955) definition of a system "as a set of elements standing in interaction" (p. 38) emerged from his two earlier separate but related concepts; the theory of organismic biology and the theory of open systems and steady states. As these concepts were the precursors of general systems theory, they

warrant review.

Organismic biology. As a young man in the 1920's, with his doctorate in Biology from the University of Vienna, Von Bertalanffy was struggling with what he believed were the limitations offered by scientific law to explain the organization of organisms. At the time, the theoretical viewpoints of mechanism and vitalism were supported by splits in the scientific community.

The mechanistic argument contended that given sufficient knowledge of the internal structure of organisms, an explanation of the origin and behavior of these living things could be explained in physical and chemical terms. In reducing the whole, parts of the whole were analyzed and studied one at a time. Central to this belief was the concept of reductionism. Concerning the mechanistic/reductionistic approach, Laszlo (1972) wrote "phenomena, however complex, were sought to yield isolated causal relations and the sum of these were believed to constitute an explanation of the phenomena themselves" (p. 5). The mechanistic view maintained that the laws of physics were applicable to both inanimate and animate objects.

The vitalists argued that the principles of chemistry and physics alone were insufficient explanations of life and living processes. They believed that the activities of organisms were the result of a vital force, an entelechy. In their recognition of the characteristics of wholeness and organic order, metaphysical or psychical factors were offered as explanations for living processes. A higher intelligence beyond the realm of scientific explanation was central to the

vitalists' theoretical stance (Schubert-Soldern, 1962).

What Von Bertalanffy sought was a scientific explanation of organisms beyond what the mechanistic and vitalistic theories offered. He believed the mechanistic theory erred with its reduction and subsequent additive view and the vitalistic contention of an immaterial, mystical entelechy was an inadequate scientific explanation. As a possible solution to the limitations of both of these theories, Von Bertalanffy offered his theory of organismic biology.

In his initial theory of organismic biology, Von Bertalanffy (1928/1962) wrote:

Since the fundamental character of the living thing is its organization, the customary investigation of the single parts and processes, even the most thorough physico-chemical analysis, cannot provide a complete investigation of the vital phenomena. This investigation gives us no information about the coordination of the parts and processes in the complicated system of the living whole which constitutes the essential 'nature' of the organism, and by which the reactions in the organism are distinguished from those in the test-tube. But no reason has been brought forward for supposing that the organization of the parts and the mutual adjustments of the vital processes cannot be treated as scientific problems. Thus, the chief task of biology must be to discover the laws of biological systems to which the ingredient parts and processes are subordinate (pp. 64-65).

Essentially what Von Bertalanffy offered in his initial work was a challenge to develop new theoretical and scientific explanations which would be related to the organization or organisms.

Open systems and steady states. The next major development in Von Bertalanffy's thinking was the theoretical concept of open systems and steady states. He suggested that the laws of physics explained only closed systems, those systems in which no material entered or left. In

an open system, such as living organisms, there was an import and export of material from the environment. Such interaction in open systems meant that there was continuous building up and breaking down process (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). The foundation of the concept of open systems and steady states lay in his expanded analysis of two existing premises. His theory regarding open systems and steady states offered an alternative view of Dreisch's (1929) experiments in embryology and of the second law of thermodynamics.

Dreisch made an unexpected discovery in the late 1800's, when after dividing a sea urchin embryo in half, he discovered that a complete whole sea urchin larva developed from each germ. Dreisch acknowledged this experiment contradicted the existing laws of physics but offered vitalism as the only possible explanation. He described this phenomenon, the development of two sea urchins from one germ, as the principle of equifinality. This meant that an equifinal goal or event, in this case an adult sea urchin, could be achieved in different ways and from varying initial conditions.

Von Bertalanffy (1950) offered several mathematical formulae as he attempted to scientifically explain this principle of equifinality. This effort represented his continued dissatisfaction with the vitalistic argument. Von Bertalanffy acknowledged some limitations with these formulae yet suggested that equifinality was a principle which existed only in open systems. In closed systems, such as in chemical equilibrium, the final outcome depended upon the initial conditions and processes. To repeatedly achieve the same outcomes in closed systems,

strict adherence to the initial conditions and processes had to be followed. A simple chemical experiment is an example of the need to adhere to specific steps in order to achieve the same final outcomes.

Von Bertalanffy's more detailed and more accepted principles regarding open systems and steady states rested in his belief in the inadequacy of the second law of thermodynamics to explain many living phenomena. As Gray, Rizzo, and Duhl (1969) report:

Von Bertalanffy had pointed out the extremely important observations that no physical theory of open systems existed at the time and the principles of thermodynamics, particularly the second law, would require expansion, as well as modification in order to be applicable to the operation of living systems (p. 12).

According to the second law of thermodynamics, closed systems have to eventually attain an equilibrium state. For example, if one places a divider in a bell jar, heats the air on the right side, and then removes the divider, eventually a uniform temperature, or equilibrium, will be achieved. This state of thermodynamic equilibrium is called the state of maximum entropy. In closed systems, this quality defined as entropy cannot decrease, it can only increase. Another example may help clarify this concept.

Consider the chemical system of a battery, a closed system. If one seals and stores a fully charged battery for a period of time, it will not be capable of doing the same amount of work it potentially had before storage. The reason for this loss of charge is because the quantity of entropy has increased, as this chemical system does not have, by itself, the ability to increase its charge. Closed systems, therefore, are unable to combat the entropy process.

The living organism, on the other hand, differs and is an active open system. Even without external stimulation, it does not remain passive. Von Bertalanffy (1955) wrote:

Every living organism is essentially an open system. It maintains itself in a continuous inflow and outflow, a building up and breaking down of components, never being, so long as it is alive, in a state of chemical and thermodynamic equilibrium but maintained in a so-called steady state which is distinct from the latter. This is the very essence of that fundamental phenomenon of life which is called metabolism, the chemical process within living cells (p. 39).

The distinction between steady states and thermodynamic equilibrium is central to the differentiation between open and closed systems. Although all systems ultimately tend toward maximum entropy or death, the open system, through its interaction with the environment, is capable of combating this process. Because of the ability of open systems to maintain themselves in steady states, they are characterized also by their ability to increase their order to achieve higher levels of differentiation and complexity. Characteristic of an open system is the ability to draw upon itself and the environment, therefore increasing its growth and development. Negentropy is the term used to describe this phenomenon in open systems.

General Systems Theory

Continuing his search for mathematical principles and theories of organizations, Von Bertalanffy lectured and wrote about the need to establish a new discipline called General Systems Theory. The purpose of general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1955) was to formulate

principles which would be applicable to all systems. This writer believes that the three words general, systems, and theory were very appropriate for this concept. He proposed a theory, general enough for scientists in all fields, biological, behavioral, and social, which could be utilized in explaining the behavior of systems. At the time, he believed that a variety of different specialties such as modern physics, physical chemistry, psychology with its Gestalt theory, biology, and other social sciences, were beginning to deal with problems related to organization, wholeness, and interaction; the problems of a systems.

The aims of general systems theory according to Von Bertalanffy (1956) were:

- a) There is a general tendency towards integration in the various sciences, natural and social.
- b) Such integration seems to be centered in a general theory of systems.
- c) Such theory may be an important means for aiming at exact theory in the non physical fields of science.
- d) Developing unifying principles running vertically through the universes of the individual sciences, this theory brings us nearer to the goal of the unity of science.
- e) This can lead to a much needed integration in scientific education (p. 2).

From these broad goals, this writer would now like to focus on specific concepts from general systems theory. It is evident to this writer that some of the concepts of general systems theory, such as time/space and energy, are more relevant to the fields of mathematics and physics. For the purpose of this paper, there is value in elaborating on three other core concepts. These are presented under the headings of organized wholeness, structure, and control.

Organized wholeness. Essential to systems thinking is the premise that the focus of any investigation is on the entire or whole organization. Limited study of selected or isolated aspects within a particular system will not yield sufficient information about that system. The whole system possesses characteristics which are unique to the whole and, obviously, no single part has the capacity for totality. As Von Bertalanffy (1972) wrote: "Aristotle's statement, 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts', is a definition of the basic system problem which is still valid" (pp. 21-22).

Though parts of a system can be separated and summed, such an accumulation of parts however, offers no information about how the parts are interacting with one another. It is only when these parts are viewed as organized and interacting that one is able to recognize that the whole represents new characteristics which are greater than the sum of the parts.

By studying parts in relationship to the whole, it becomes evident that no single part or element in the system acts independently. Each part is mutually influential on the whole system. The parts represent an interactional process whereby each part is being influenced while in turn influencing other parts. Because each part is mutually influential, the system is composed of interdependent versus independent parts. This concept of interaction is basic to the systems' concept of organization and wholeness. As will be presented later in this paper, the concept of interaction within the whole organization is related to the concepts of control and change.

The general systems theory concept of equifinality, which suggests that similar final outcomes or organized wholeness can be achieved from different beginnings and by different processes, is also of value when studying systems. Investigating how the organized whole developed is of less value than analyzing the current structure of the system. This general systems theory concept suggests that the history taking process, designed to determine what caused the system to evolve, is unnecessary. Later in this paper, the concept of equifinality appears again as it is influential in the treatment of problems in a family system.

Understanding what comprises an organized whole is presented in the following section entitled structure.

Structure. Within a system one is able to discern and describe its boundaries, subsystems, and hierarchy. As defined by Immegart and Pilecki (1973), boundaries are "arbitrary demarcations of that which is included within the system and that which is excluded from it" (p. 35). Depending on the type of system, boundaries may be easily identified and perceived. For example, one of the functions of our skin is to serve as a boundary for our bodies. In this example, the boundary is capable of being seen and felt. In other systems, such as schools or families, the boundaries are non tangible.

The nature of the permeability of a system's boundaries is critical to its life, maintenance and growth. In living systems, Skynner (1976) asserts:

Failure of the boundary to restrict exchange across it leads to a loss of difference between the living thing and its surroundings,

of its separate identity; instead, there develops an identity of inside and outside one meaning of death. Too impermeable a boundary, preventing any exchange, brings another form of death (p. 5).

Perhaps we have all seen both of these extremes. The system which terminates because the boundaries are very rigid, causing minimal exchange of ideas or input from the outside environment. The other extreme is the system which is chaotic and overloaded because the boundaries are too permeable. In this example, the boundaries of the system have not been able to exclude outside influences appropriately. Boundaries function to demarcate the system from the outside as well as demarcate parts or subsystems within the whole system.

Any system may be divided into subsystems. Depending on the type of system, the membership characteristics defining these elements of the system may vary. For example, a stereophonic sound system is composed of various parts or subsystems; receiver, turntable, and speakers. Membership in a subsystem is characterized by function. Each of the subsystems serve specific functions and a change in the quality or performance in any one will affect the entire sound system.

Just as one is able to discern a systems boundaries and subsystems, its hierarchy or level structure is also recognizable. This concept of hierarchy is useful in conceptualizing how systems and subsystems interact with each other at various levels. As Steinglass (1978) writes:

Each system is envisioned as composed of component subsystems of smaller scale, and in turn, as being a component part of a larger suprasystem. Once again, the emphasis is on a notion of the universe organized along order and highly structured lines, with

clearly identifiable differential levels of complexity that relate in logical fashion one to another (p. 309).

Essentially in all systems the hierarchy changes from being a whole at one level and a part of a whole on a more complex level. An organizational flow chart of a bank indicates the hierarchical structure for an entire organization. In this example, each department head is responsible for a specific whole system while simultaneously being only part of the entire organizational system. In carrying this example one further step, it is evident that one organization may be conceived as being a whole while simultaneously remaining only a part of the greater whole, the suprasystem called the economy. Obviously, the economic system is only part of a greater suprasystem. The point is that each is related to one another in the hierarchy and the resonance of change on other systems will depend on where in the hierarchy the change is implemented. For example the board of directors of a bank, being at a higher level in the hierarchy, have greater capacity to effect change than a bank teller who is lower in the hierarchical order. Important to the concept of change are concepts reflected in general systems theory regarding control.

Control. Central concepts related to the issue of control within systems are homeostasis and feedback. Homeostasis refers to the self regulatory process characteristic of open, living systems. Feedback is the mechanism which influences and contributes to this self regulating or homeostatic process.

Cannon (1939) first introduced the term homeostasis to describe

the functional process of the neuroendocrine system in the human body. The autonomic nervous system and the endocrine or hormonal system interact together to maintain the vital balance of several biological functions, such as body temperature and blood pressure. These involuntary systems serve to keep the body functioning within certain tolerable levels when it is threatened by an imbalance. Perspiration, for example, serves to cool the body when it begins to get overheated. As reported earlier in this paper, this homeostatic return to a steady state differentiates open and closed systems. Open systems are receptive and responsive to internal and external forces which threaten its stability. Homeostasis is a descriptive term for this balancing of the system.

Homeostasis has often been misinterpreted as a dysfunctional construct. The implication is that homeostasis prevents systems from changing and developing. Homeostasis is, however, a characteristic of all open systems as they exhibit the tendency to return to balanced steady states. What appears to vary is the degree of resistance to change because all open systems are characterized by their capacity for morphogenesis. Morphogenesis refers to the systems' ability to progress, change, and develop further. Open systems can be seen, therefore, to have characteristics of stabilization as well as change. These concepts are critical for implementors of system change. There needs to be the awareness of the systems' functional homeostatic tendency to remain stable with its preferred styles of interacting as well as its morphogenic capacity for ongoing growth and development.

The mechanisms that contribute to this balancing process of homeostasis and morphogenesis are negative and positive feedback. Integrated within general systems theory have been principles gained from cybernetics, the study of methods of feedback control (Miller, 1969).

Basic to the concept of feedback and control are feedback loops which indicate that events are related in a loop or circular fashion. This means that a systems input not only affects output, but that output in turn loops back and affects and adjusts input. This concept of circular causality is of major importance to systems thinking as it abolishes the notion of linear causality which assumes that two events are related in a limited cause and effect fashion. A technical example of water balance in the human body (Elkinton & Danowski, 1955) serves as an example of circular causality.

The output of water in excess of electrolyte controlled by the antidiuretic hormone in the kidney, produces a rise in extra-cellular electrolyte concentrations. The rise in this concentration feeds back to the osmoreceptors in the hypothalamus to stimulate the production of antidiuretic hormone (ADH) in the supraoptico-hypophyseal system, and so the error in output of water tends to be corrected. At the same time this system is linked to regulations of intake through thirst. Hypertonicity of extra cellular fluid with resultant cellular dehydration stimulates thirst and increased intake of water as well as the production of ADH. Thus both intake and output are regulated to minimize error in the water content of the body (p. 24).

This complex explanation of a physiological process demonstrates how these subsystems are part of mutually influencing processes. One event can not be said to cause the other but rather, they are interacting, each affecting the other. Circular causality is a major tenet of general systems theory used in explaining the behavior of systems.

The feedback process used to describe the above concept of circular causality is an example of negative feedback. The achievement of a balance between the deviations produced in subsystems is the function of negative feedback. The physiological example of output and input of water demonstrated how decreases in one subsystem are offset by increases in another subsystem and vice versa. Deviations within the negative feedback loop are cancelled out. Negative feedback corrects errors and enables the system to remain in a balanced steady state.

In the positive feedback loop, on the other hand, "an increase in any component part of the loop will, in turn, increase the next event in the circular sequence" (Steinglass, p. 313). This alteration and amplification destroys the system's steady state and initiates system change. The chain reaction of an atom bomb is an example of a positive feedback loop wherein increases in one part of the chain activates other parts so rapidly an explosion is produced. The run away ability of positive feedback loops is potentially lethal to the system. This is productive when interventions for change are strategically designed, thus enabling a dysfunctional system to achieve more optimal levels of functioning. The former system diminishes and a new one is created. Theoretically, when new types of interacting are achieved, the homeostatic process will function to maintain this new system.

This section has attempted to provide the reader with some of the major concepts of general systems theory which are of specific importance in the behavioral sciences. These core concepts of organized

wholeness, structure, and control have been highly influential in the development of a variety of systems sciences. The interested reader is referred to Immegart and Pilecki (1973) for a review of such fields as holism, operations research, systems analysis, systems design, and systems engineering. For the purposes of this paper, this author will now focus on family therapy regarding its theory and practice of changing problematic behavior from a systems perspective. It will become evident how family therapy in general, and structural family therapy in particular, have been influenced by the general systems theory concepts of organized wholeness, structure, and control.

Family Therapy

Family therapy is difficult to succinctly define because of the variety of ways families are being treated (Haley & Hoffman, 1967). Even with the variety of approaches within the practice of family therapy, Bloch and LaPerriere (1973) write:

What unites all family therapists is the view that change, which is significant to the psychotherapeutic endeavor, takes place in the family system. With this unifying thread, they may vary considerably as to the size of the elements of the family they engage, the technique they employ and the theory to which they adhere (p. 1).

As these authors acknowledge, family therapy conceptualizes change as taking place within the family system but not all family therapists practice with a systems orientation. For example, Ackerman (1951) emphasizes role relationships and Grotjahn (1960) is psychodynamically based in his emphasis on the intrapsychic. Since this paper focuses on the specific contributions of general systems theory movement on

family therapy, the overall historical development of family therapy and other theoretical approaches is not included. The interested reader is referred to Bloch (1973), Erickson and Hogan (1972), Foley (1974), Guerin (1976), and Waldrond-Skinner (1976) for such a review.

Currently the systems orientation is the major theoretical perspective in the field of family therapy (Steinglass, 1978). In family therapy, Guerin (1976) suggests there are four classifications of systems orientations: "General systems, structural family therapy, strategic family therapy, and Bowenian family systems theory and therapy" (p. 21). For the purpose of this paper, this writer will focus on structural family therapy. Essential to the understanding of structural family therapy is a general review of Bateson's communication project. The emerging theoretical orientation of this project was influential in the development of structural family therapy (Madanes & Haley, 1977).

Bateson's Communication Project

In 1952, Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist at Stanford University, received a grant to study communication in schizophrenia. Hired full-time to this project were Jay Haley and John Weakland. Donald Jackson later joined the group as a part-time psychiatric consultant. Between the years of 1952 and 1962, over 70 articles and books primarily in the field of schizophrenia, therapy, and hypnosis were written by members of this group. The interested reader is referred to Glick and Haley (1971) and Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland (1963) for a complete

bibliography. A review of a few of these articles which demonstrate the influence of general systems theory on their work follows.

In 1954, Donald Jackson presented a paper entitled The Question of Family Homeostasis at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. This paper was later published (Jackson, 1957). His work was clearly influenced by specific principles of general systems theory; organized wholeness, homeostasis, and equifinality. Jackson suggested that family systems, like other open systems, were governed by negative feedback processes which served to maintain a homeostatic balance. The basis for using this systems theory concept rested in two clinically observable phenomena. When treating schizophrenics individually, it was frequently apparent that the family almost intentionally worked to sabotage the treatment process. Secondly, as the patient began to improve, often some other family member would become symptomatic or less functional. It was theorized that not only was the family influential in the development of the schizophrenic syndrome, but more importantly, the family continued to be influential in its maintenance. The symptoms served as a homeostatic balancing influence upon the system. Using Hall and Fagen's (1956) definition of a system,

A set of objects together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes in which objects are components or parts of the system, attributes are the properties of objects, and the relationships tie the system together (p. 11)

Jackson contended that the treatment of schizophrenia should focus on the context of relationships that currently existed within the organized wholeness of the family system. This argument was further defended with the general systems theory concept of equifinality. Knowing that

similar final states could be achieved from different initial conditions and in different ways, Jackson maintained that searching for the causes of symptomatic behavior was a non productive venture. The equifinal state, in this case a symptom, regardless of whether it was stealing, depression, schizophrenia or whatever, could have been produced in any number of ways. Therefore, treatment efforts should be directed at changing the present, whole family organization.

Clearly, Jackson's utilization of the concepts of homeostasis, equifinality, and wholeness were influential in the development of a theoretical shift regarding the etiology and treatment of human problems. As Foley (1974) asserts, "Jackson has moved from the concept of health/sickness into a world of cybernetics and feedback. He has created a new way of looking at human interaction" (p. 71). Jackson's point of view appears to be an early recognition of the value of treating human problems at the interpersonal level as opposed to the intrapsychic.

This theoretical perspective was further substantiated from interviews with patients and their families at the Veterans Hospital in Palo Alto, California. A theoretical paper emerged from this process (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956). This research postulated a theory of schizophrenia based on a communication concept called the double bind. Bateson et al. theorized that a particular type of communication, called the double bind, existed in families with a schizophrenic member. The schizophrenic member, they contended, had been raised in an atmosphere, where no matter what that person did, they

were in a no win position; the essence of the double bind theory. They speculated that the kind of family interaction, their method of verbal and non-verbal communication, had the ability to produce schizophrenic symptoms. As it is not within the scope of this paper to review the history and current status of the double bind theory, the reader is referred to Sluzki and Ransome (1976) and Berger (1978). The value of this article for the purpose of this paper is not in the double bind concept but rather in these authors' conceptualization of the functional and interactional basis for symptomatic behavior in a family. This systemic perspective is apparent in their writing about the double bind. Bateson et al. (1956) suggested that "according to our theory, the communication situation described is essential to the mother's security, and by inference to the family homeostasis" (p. 261).

The persistent systems theme in all of their writing on schizophrenia (Haley, 1959a, 1959b, 1960; Jackson & Weakland, 1959) is on the functional aspect of this behavior within the context of the family system. As Jackson and Weakland (1959) assert:

In the past, the customary view of the symptomatic behavior of schizophrenics was that it was crazy or senseless. This implied one or both of two main characteristics separating it from normal behavior; that it was pointless, purposeless, unrelated to the patients' life situation. It rather seems to us that schizophrenic behavior when viewed in its family context, (a) resembles the behavior of other family members, though it may be exaggerated almost to a caricature and (b) appears to subserve important functions within the family (p. 621).

As the Bateson project was important in the development of family therapy, so was the Mental Research Institute which was established in

March 1959 by Dr. Jackson. The primary staff of John Weakland, Jay Haley, Jules Ruskin, Virginia Satir, and Paul Watzlawick were hired as teachers, researchers, and practitioners of conjoint family therapy. This group continued to advance the systems perspective of human problem formation and resolution.

A volume of representative writing of this group's efforts was edited by Watzlawick and Weakland (1977). The Interactional View elaborates on the theory and practice of treating families systemically. The intent of writing about the Bateson project and the mental research group is to acknowledge that their efforts represented a major theoretical shift in the conceptualization and treatment of human problems from the intrapsychic to the interactional. This shift was influential in the development of structural family therapy. Madanes and Haley (1977) report:

There were basically two branches of therapy developing out of the communication approach; one was structural, emphasizing the hierarchical organization in the family and describing different communication structures. The other was the strategic, also emphasizing organizational structure but focusing more on the repeated sequences on which structures are based (p. 95).

This researcher chose to focus on structural family therapy as opposed to strategic family therapy because the former approach offers a clearer and more comprehensive method of analyzing the family system. The focus on structural family therapy will be presented under the following headings: concepts, practice, and research. For a clearer understanding of this research, the reader should pay particular attention to the concepts and practice sections.

Structural Family Therapy

Concepts. Structural Family therapy according to Minuchin (1974) is:

A body of theory and techniques that approaches the individual in his social context. Therapy based on this framework is directed toward changing the organization of the family. When the structure of the family group is transformed, the positions of members in that group are altered accordingly. As a result, each individuals' experiences change (p. 2).

In this approach, the family is seen as being the most influential social system in which individuals interact. Thus treating individuals in relationship to the context of the family means that all family members that are living in the home, including extended family, are included in the sessions. On occasion, this conjoint family treatment approach may include other relatives who live in the vicinity. Because this approach views individuals in relationship to their social context, a structural family therapist may broaden the scope of assistance to include involvement with schools (Aponte, 1976) and social agencies.

The general systems theory concepts regarding organized wholeness, structure, and control are very evident in the theory and practice of structural family therapy. It is interesting to note that Minuchin never explicitly acknowledges being influenced by general systems theory. Only in his latest volume Psychosomatic Families is any reference made to Von Bertalanffy. Yet the whole family system is seen as being greater than the sum of its parts. Minuchin (1974) states it in the following way, "The family is more than the biopsychodynamics of its members" (p. 89). As postulated in general systems theory, studying isolated segments of any whole system will not yield sufficient

information about that system. Thus the focus of family therapy, in general, and structural family therapy, in particular, is on individual symptomatic behavior in relationship to the family's organization or structure. As a result, symptomatic behavior is conceptualized as both influencing and influenced by the family structure.

The earlier technical example of water balance in the body described how elements of the whole mutually influenced each other in a circular causal manner. The structural family therapist utilizes this concept of circular causality in regard to symptomatic behavior. In most cases, families seek treatment because one member is identified as having the problem. In viewing the family as an organized whole, this symptom, according to Minuchin (1974), is "assumed to be a system-maintaining or a system-maintained device" (p. 110). Conceptualizing the family as an organized whole, linear causation is replaced by circular causation. As Minuchin, Rosman, and Baker (1978) maintain:

In the linear model, the behavior of the individual is seen as sparked by others. It presumes an action and a reaction, a stimulus and a response, or a cause and an effect. In the systems paradigm, every part of a system is seen as organizing and being organized by other parts. An individuals' behavior is simultaneously both caused and causative. A beginning or an end are defined only by arbitrary framing and punctuating. The action of one part is, simultaneously, the interrelationship of other parts of the system (p. 20).

The structure of the family system serves to define patterns of interaction and behavior of all the family members. Minuchin (1974) defines family structure as "the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact" (p. 51). Once these transactional patterns are repeated through trial and error,

they become the preferred styles, or ways of interacting within the family system. Central to the therapist's task in this method of treatment is discerning the organization of the family with its repeated and dysfunctional patterns of interaction which are maintained, almost always, out of the awareness of all the members. This assessment process will be described more fully later in the paper.

Conceptualizing families as organized systems means that they possess subsystems, boundaries, and hierarchies. These concepts from general systems theory are central in the conceptualization of families according to structural family therapy. They are critical in that they are utilized in all phases of the work with families from description, analysis, to treatment.

As with any system, families are composed of discernable subsystems. Minuchin (1974) states that membership in subsystems can "be formed by generation, by sex, by interests, or by function" (p. 52). Thus a family has a variety of subsystems composed of husband and wife, brothers and sisters, father and children, and mother and children. Each subsystem performs a myriad of functions with the intent of differentiating the whole system.

Within each subsystem, there exists boundaries which define the rules of interaction between its members. Regarding boundaries, Minuchin (1974) states "the composition of subsystems organized around family functions is not nearly as significant as the clarity of subsystem boundaries" (p. 54). Determining the degree of clarity becomes a significant diagnostic tool in structural family therapy. These

boundaries or rules defining the nature of interaction within subsystems may be described as being disengaged (rigid), clear, or enmeshed (diffuse) (Minuchin, 1974). In a system or subsystem where the preferred style of interpersonal interaction is extremely disengaged, one will see members tolerating a wide range of behavior with one another. There is little loyalty, appropriate support for members is minimal, and the behavior of one person does not affect other members. Such disengaged families rarely seek therapy and are most often referred for treatment after repeated suicide attempts or confrontations with law enforcement and judicial officials.

On the other hand, the extremely enmeshed system or subsystem represents the opposite picture. The sense of loyalty is so great that members yield autonomy and as a result of overprotection, they do not achieve age appropriate levels of responsibility and skill. Communication between members is interrupted as other members intrude. Within enmeshed families, there is a low threshold of tolerance for conflict and reluctance to change when change is appropriate. Commenting on enmeshment and disengagement, Minuchin (1974) writes that these concepts "refer to a transactional style or preference for a type of interaction, not to a qualitative difference between functional and dysfunctional. Most families have enmeshed and disengaged subsystems" (p. 55).

Clear boundaries, which are optimal, exist on a continuum between the disengaged and enmeshed boundaries. When boundaries are clear, members possess a sense of loyalty, yet not to the degree that individual resources are relinquished. Members have a sense of involvement

with each other but are able to contain private matters to specific subsystems. An example is seen in a parental subsystem where children have access to both parents while also being excluded from functions or decisions which are specific to the parental subsystem. This model suggests that some functions such as discipline clearly belong in the parental subsystem. In this example a hierarchy of functioning is evident. In a family, hierarchical levels can be determined within the system as well as within subsystems. For example, in the sibling subsystem, older children would be expected to have more responsibility and autonomy than younger siblings. In the parental or executive subsystem when the boundaries are clear, one is able to see parents providing a balance of nurturance and effective control. In enmeshed systems, confusion reigns in the executive hierarchy. The democratic family characterized by all members having input into important decisions would be considered, in structural family therapy terms, violations of the boundary between parental and sibling subsystems.

These general systems theory concepts of subsystems, boundaries, and hierarchies are critical diagnostic concepts to the structural family therapist. In the process of meeting with the family, the therapist will be observing and asking questions which will yield information regarding the present organization and structure of the family. A structural map (Minuchin, 1974) which graphically depicts the system's hierarchical organization and structure, according to its subsystems and boundaries, is then drawn. For example in the following figure the father's (F) relationship with other members of the family

is indicated by a solid line which represents a disengaged position. An inappropriate hierarchy is indicated as one son (S) and his mother (M) are shown to be overinvolved in the parental subsystem. The boundaries between the sibling subsystem which contain another son (S) and daughter (D) and the parental subsystem are shown to be diffuse by the dotted lines and disengaged by the solid line.

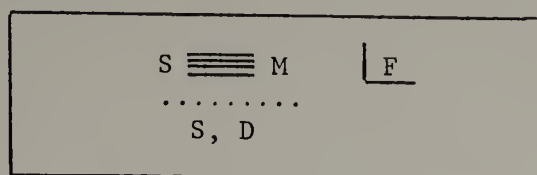


Fig. 1. A structural map indicating a family's hierarchy, structure, and boundaries.

For a more detailed explanation of the structural map see Appendix A. This paper will continue with a review of the practice of structural family therapy.

Practice. Simply stated, (Minuchin, 1978) the "therapists' general long range goal is therefore to shake the dysfunctional system and to facilitate the appearance of alternative modalities of transacting" (p. 93). By rearranging the structure, the preferred styles of interacting, structural family therapists theorize that new interpersonal transactions occur as a result of this change. Each person then experiences themselves and each other in new, more functional ways.

In the practice of structural family therapy, it is explicitly clear that the therapist is actively involved in and responsible for the process of change. Any credit for change, however, is given to the

family. For example, if a therapist directed the family to perform a specific "homework task" between sessions and they reported successful completion at the next session, the therapist would praise the family for their efforts.

In this action oriented therapy, change occurs as a result of three specific functions of the therapist. According to Minuchin (1974):

The therapist joins the family in a position of leadership. He unearths and evaluates the underlying family structure and he creates circumstances that will allow the transformation of this structure (p. 111).

A brief description of these three functions will be presented under the following headings: joining, assessment, and restructuring.

Joining. Joining refers to a collective set of verbal and non-verbal techniques used by the therapist to gain entrance into the family system in a hierarchical position of leadership (Minuchin, 1974). Unless one is able to successfully enter the family system and become part of it, attempts to change the system will fail. In an effort to become part of the system, the therapist in the initial interviews will want to learn about the organization and structure of the particular family. The simple question, "could someone tell me about the problem?", will reveal some characteristics of the family organization. If father is silent and the mother responds, the therapist begins to make some assumptions about the leadership in the family. This hypothesis about mother's leadership will be tested again by other questions. In this joining process, the therapist is accommodating to

the family's organization in an effort to blend with them. Efforts are made to join members at the system, subsystem, and individual levels. In this process, the therapist becomes part of the family system, but of critical importance, maintains the position of leadership having the capacity to pull out of the system as desired. Outside of the family system, the therapist is able to make interventions derived from assessing the family which will influence systemic change. While the therapist is working to gain entrance into the family system, a conscious effort is being made to assess the family in specific ways. This assessment process will be briefly described in the next section.

Assessment. Based on the therapist's experiences and observations gained in the process of joining the family, an assessment of the entire family in its present context emerges. This assessment of the family's interaction includes six areas: (1) the family structure as demonstrated by interpersonal patterns of transaction, (2) the system's flexibility for restructuring, (3) the system and various subsystems location on the disengaged/enmeshed continuum, (4) the sources of outside stress and support, (5) the family's current developmental stage, and (6) the ways in which the identified patient's symptom is system sustained and sustaining (Minuchin, 1974). For a detailed description of these six areas of assessment, the reader is referred to Minuchin (1974, pp. 129-132). This initial comprehensive assessment serves to provide the direction of the restructuring of the family system. However, throughout the course of therapy, the therapist is constantly reassessing the family according to these criteria. The

methods of restructuring are described in the section that follows.

Restructuring. Methods of restructuring refer to a variety of interventions, initiated by the therapist, aimed at confronting and challenging the existing dysfunctional organization within the family. The restructuring interventions may be done directly in the session or between sessions in the form of homework assignments. Regardless of whether the intervention is done in or outside of the session, Minuchin (1974) emphasizes that "the therapist's job is to manipulate the family system toward planned change" (pp. 139-140). In structural family therapy, it is explicitly clear that the therapist is influential in directing the family system toward the therapeutic goals which have been determined through the efforts of joining and assessing the family.

Minuchin (1974), in identifying seven broad categories of restructuring operations, admits that these categories are not all inclusive as other interventions may be introduced depending on the style of the family and the therapist. However, with these qualifiers, most interventions fall within the following seven categories: "actualizing family transactional patterns, marking boundaries, escalating stress, assigning tasks, utilizing symptoms, manipulating mood, and supporting, educating, or guiding" (p. 140). For a comprehensive description of the restructuring interventions within these categories, the reader is referred to Minuchin (1974, pp. 140-157).

This section of the paper has attempted to provide the reader with a general understanding of the concepts and techniques used by a therapist in the practice of structural family therapy. Included in

the next section will be a review of articles which have reported on the application of structural family therapy.

Research. Though as Minuchin, Rosman, and Baker (1978) assert, "in the final analysis, the value of any rationale for psychiatric treatment can be established only on the grounds of efficacy" (p. 126), structural family therapy has not clearly demonstrated its efficacy through rigorously designed empirical studies. It is the opinion of this writer that this observation certainly is not restricted to the practice of structural family therapy, but is also true for many methods of psychotherapy. As Wells, Dilkes, and Trivelli (1972) report: "Most clinicians are 'true believers' in that they continue to practice in the absence of substantial (or unequivocal) evidence of the efficacy of their methods" (p. 202). Although it is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate on the reasons for the limited research in psychotherapy, there remains value in reviewing some of the articles, though limited, which discuss the outcomes of structural family therapy with a variety of problems.

Clearly the research methodology most frequently utilized has been the case study approach. Several cases have been reported where structural family therapy has been utilized. Before structural family therapy was as clearly defined as it is currently, several central concepts were developed with low income families who had delinquent children. (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967; Minuchin & Montalvo, 1967; Minuchin, 1965). Since the refinement of the approach, the successful use of structural family therapy is

reported in cases of families whose children were drug dependent (Stanton & Todd, 1979), discipline problems at home and in school (Heard, 1978), symptomatic after a divorce (Kaplan, 1977), dog phobic (Haley, 1976), and school phobic (Berger, 1974). A case where the symptoms are in an adult family member is described by Minuchin (1974). A case involving a family whose daughter is asthmatic and starving herself (anorexia nervosa), is reported by Combrinck-Graham (1974). Another case of an anorectic, self starving child, is described by Aponte and Hoffman (1973). All of these articles basically describe the successful outcomes of one or more cases after the processes of joining, assessing, and restructuring the family. Success is described as the removal of the symptomatic behavior as a result of alterations in the family structure and boundaries.

The therapeutic rationale and process of this method of treatment is most recently described by Minuchin, Rosman, and Baker (1978) in their book entitled Psychosomatic Families. This work represents the final report of a 10 year research project of treating families whose young children, or adolescents, are either diabetic, asthmatic, or anorectic. For clarification, it is important to understand that these authors are explicitly clear that asthma and diabetes do not occur because of emotional conflicts. In treating families where these symptoms are present, this group differentiates between primary and secondary psychosomatic disorders.

In the primary disorders, a physiological dysfunction is already present. These include metabolic disorders like diabetes and allergic diathesis such as that found in asthma. The psychosomatic

element lies in the emotional exacerbation of the already available symptom. Thus, a child with diabetes who has recurrent bouts of ketoacidosis triggered by emotional arousal can be considered a psychosomatic diabetic. Likewise, a child with asthma whose recurrent and severe attacks represent an exacerbation of the underlying disorder in response to emotional rather than physiological stimuli can be termed a 'psychosomatic asthmatic' (p. 29).

The psychosomatic diabetic and the psychosomatic asthmatic children are repeatedly hospitalized for their conditions, whereas non psychosomatic diabetic and non psychosomatic asthmatic children are not repeatedly finding themselves in these life threatening circumstances.

Anorexia nervosa, on the other hand, is considered a secondary psychosomatic disorder because of the lack of any precipitating physiological dysfunction. In these cases, emotional conflicts appear in somatic symptoms.

With these distinctions of primary and secondary psychosomatic disorders in mind, these authors begin to identify similar interpersonal transactional patterns in all of these families regardless of whether the symptom is diabetes, asthma, or anorexia nervosa. As this section is primarily concerned with treatment outcomes, the reader is referred to the book Psychosomatic Families for a description of these characteristics.

Psychosomatic Families focuses primarily on the therapeutic approach with four cases where anorexia nervosa is the presenting symptom. Also included, however, is a review of the 53 cases analyzed according to: (1) descriptive characteristics such as sex, age, percent of weight loss, time period between onset and referral for

treatment, (2) length of treatment as an inpatient and in family therapy, and (3) follow-up data which included medical and psychosocial factors of adjustment with family, school, work, and with peers. Of the 53 cases reported, 3 dropped out of treatment, 43 (85%) of the treated sample were assessed "good" medically and psychosocially at follow-up, 2 cases (4%) were assessed "fair", 3 cases (6%) were assessed "unimproved", and 2 cases (4%) were assessed "relapsed".

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the case study method has been the prevalent research method used in structural family therapy. This research method is often used when new methods of treatment are being developed. Also, because of the life and death issues involved with these serious psychosomatic symptoms, it is highly unlikely that treatment will be delayed or impeded to meet the requirements of research designs. Minuchin, Rosman, and Baker (1978) acknowledge:

Theoretically, controlled studies comparing different treatments with each other or with no treatment would be ideal. However, the vast majority of reports on the effectiveness of anorexia treatment describe programs like ours, conducted within clinical contexts. Thus, controlled comparisons of different treatments on matched populations are neither clinically nor ethically feasible (p. 127).

The reader who is interested in the early publications of this research project is referred to three articles. The first reports results with asthmatic, diabetic, and anorectic families (Minuchin, Baker, Rosman, Liebman, Milman, & Todd, 1975). This article was an expansion of the initial papers on the treatment of the anorectic (Liebman, Minuchin, & Baker, 1974a) and the treatment of the asthmatic

(Liebman, Minuchin, & Baker, 1974b).

The paper to this point has attempted to provide the reader with an understanding of some of the central concepts of general systems theory and structural family therapy. This systems based therapy has shown to be an effective way to assess and treat families with a variety of problems. To date there appears to be no reported studies which have conjointly interviewed college dropout students and their families. The preceding review was intended to assist the reader's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this researcher's study.

This paper becomes more specific now as it will focus on the college dropout phenomenon placing major emphasis on conceptualizing first semester freshmen dropouts from a family systems perspective. Preceding a review of what has been written about dropping out from a family systems orientation, some general comments about attrition research follows.

Attrition Research

The extent to which the dropout has been studied is impressive. Characteristics of dropout students have been counted and analyzed from many different perspectives. The general goal of creating a profile of the typical dropout has been less impressive. Though an ambitious and perhaps valuable goal, this writer has to agree with Cope and Hannah (1975) who report on the results of attrition research by stating, "findings are often contradictory and seldom illuminate the source of

difficulty for either the student or the college" (p. 8).

There are several reasons for reaching this conclusion. Too often studies have not been adequately controlled and generalizations have been extended beyond the scope of the specific research. For example, it is not uncommon to find students from public community colleges included with students from universities and private colleges, and results being inferred to all dropouts. These dropout profiles are not helpful to specific institutions as the research (Cope, 1978) has shown that select private colleges have significantly higher retaining rates than other types of institutions.

Another problem has been in the definition of dropout. Some studies have included students who have been dismissed for academic, behavioral, or medical/psychiatric reasons. Others have not included students who have never returned after semester breaks. Some, such as McMillan's (1977) study on freshmen dropouts, reported results when fewer than 25% of the sample group returned the questionnaires.

The replication of studies is another concern. Studies have either never replicated or when they have, the later results have not supported earlier findings (Sharp & Chason, 1978).

Another issue, in the opinion of this author, lies in the questionable value and practical usefulness of some of the reported results. An example is Astin's (1975) research. He concluded from his study of 153 independent variables in a regression analysis that:

Those most "dropout prone" freshmen are those with poor academic records in high school, low aspirations, poor study habits, relatively uneducated parents, and small town backgrounds.

Dropping out is also associated with being older than most freshmen, having Protestant parents, having no current religious preferences, and being a cigarette smoker (p. 45).

Statistical significance versus real significance is another concern. Irvine's (1966) five year study of 650 men at the University of Georgia is an example. Multiple correlation coefficients were computed on 10 pre-admission variables; high school average, math and verbal scholastic aptitude test scores, number in high school class, third of high school class, and the number of high school units earned in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign language. The best single predictor of persistence at the University was high school grade point average with a correlation of .34. This correlation realistically does not account for much of the variance.

The point is that caution is needed when reviewing the research on college attrition. It is very evident that it is difficult to clearly differentiate the dropout from the persister. Timmons (1977) reported that on his questionnaire regarding adjustment problems in college, a random sample of persisting freshmen reported significantly more problems than a group of freshmen that withdrew from the same institution.

Because of the lack of agreement of what is responsible for the dropout behavior coupled with the growing need to better understand this phenomenon, this writer proposed an investigation into the family system of first semester freshmen dropouts. It was believed that a structural assessment of these families will yield more definite information beyond the general conclusions which were reached by

Pantages and Creedon (1978) who reported that "attrition is the result of an extremely intricate interplay among a multitude of variables" (p. 94).

As this paper is focusing on the systemic interaction of dropouts and their families, there is no value in reviewing the literature which traditionally focuses on characteristics of the individual, characteristics of the institutions, and the fit or relationship between these two variables. For such a review, the interested reader is referred to Astin (1975), Pantages and Creedon (1978), and Tinto (1975).

Emphasis will now focus on what is reported about the family systems of the college dropouts. Several research efforts (McMillan, 1977; Rump & Greet, 1975; Sensor, 1967; White, 1971) have reported "family problems" being influential in a student's decision to leave college. In none of these studies were families ever contacted or interviewed. To date, the most elaborate and detailed research into dropouts and their families was conducted at the dropout clinic at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology. A description and critique of this project follows under separate headings.

Dropout Clinic Project

Description. There have been several publications describing this project (Levenson, 1966, 1965, 1964a, 1964b; Levenson & Kohn, 1965, 1964; Levenson, Stockhamer & Feiner, 1967; Levenson, J. S., 1964). Dr. Edgar Levenson, in his position of founder and director of the

young adult treatment service at the William Alanson White Institute, received a grant in 1962 from the National Institute of Mental Health to establish a clinic to which colleges could refer students who had dropped out. Described by Levenson (1964a) the purpose of the project was "to screen a group of college dropouts after they had left campus, to offer them psychotherapy and to accumulate relevant data about these students and their clinical course" (p. 1). The idea of providing psychotherapy to these students was consistent with the staff objectives. They had written deans and student health personnel asking them to refer dropouts that they viewed as academically capable but having some degree of emotional disturbance. In an effort not to bias this population, they did not define emotional disturbance to these college administrators. Of the 71 colleges which were contacted during the first year, 62 indicated an interest in the project and 38 referred 101 students for treatment (Levenson & Kohn, 1964).

After an extensive screening process which consisted of separate interviews with a psychiatrist and a social worker, a battery of tests, including intelligence and projective measures, were administered. Thirty-six students were selected for therapy by the end of the first year of the project. A student's desire to return or not to return to college had no bearing on acceptance into therapy. Acceptance, as reported by Levenson and Kohn (1964) was based on the following criteria:

First, the extent to which we estimated that the dropping out was causally connected with the college experiences as an emotional crisis. Second, an assessment of the students' intelligence, originality, and genuine interest in education and last, an assessment of the likelihood of his responding to therapy (p. 1).

Once accepted for therapy students were seen individually for weekly 50 minute sessions. The treatment orientation was psychodynamic with one year of treatment being the norm, though some students were seen for two years. Two group therapy projects, which were concomitant with individual therapy, also began. After the project was two years old, Levenson et al. (1967) reported that, "under pressure from the parents for help, we initiated a parent discussion group" (p. 138). This structure of individual and group psychodynamic psychotherapy and parent discussion groups remained as their treatment approach. A telephone conversation (March 20, 1979) with Dr. Levenson confirmed this author's suspicion that during the five years which the project was funded, no families were treated conjointly. This is of interest because Levenson and Kohn (1965) wrote, "the usefulness of the parent group, both for the collection of data and for its relevance to the individual therapy of the patients, is so evident that we plan to establish a much more elaborate family therapy program" (p. 416). The fact that a family therapy component was never added after conceptualizing the dropout behavior systemically is one of this author's main criticisms of the project.

Critique. It is very apparent that the dropout phenomenon grew to become conceptualized systemically. After assessing and treating their students, Levenson et al. (1967) wrote, "No test pattern, diagnostic category, or pattern of study habits clearly differentiates dropout from stay-in" (p. 138). With this heterogeneous group of students,

however, a critical homogeneous trend became apparent. Levenson (1964a) maintained that it became:

Most useful to view the dropping out as homeostatic operation, its intent being to maintain the existing equilibrium of the family by reinforcing established roles and relationships. . . . The dropout may be said to be a 'compassionate sacrifice' to the needs of his family (p. 3).

This systemic conceptualization of dropout behavior emerged after the parent interviews and the parent discussion groups were established. This parent treatment component led Levenson (1964a) to the following conclusion:

There is a strong prevalent modal pattern among our population in which the presence of the child, in his established role, is important and frequently necessary to the maintenance of the fiction of the successful well-integrated family, operating without friction, in spite of the presence, very close to the surface, of intense disruptive feelings. . . . In our parent group, for instance, this need to see themselves as concerned and rather righteous people working very hard to help their difficult and incomprehensible children was very evident. If their attention shifted to their own interactions, a very high level of stress became evident and the amount of brittleness in their marital relationships came into focus. Without the buffer of the child present, they appear to have virtually no way of dealing with any confrontation with each other (p. 4).

This interactional theme of the child being a buffer to the parents appears to be a rigid pattern which has been maintained over the years. It strongly suggests that these families have not been able to successfully negotiate change when change is required at various stages of the family developmental life cycle (Duvall, 1971).

The data reported from the dropout clinic (Levenson & Kohn, 1965, 1964) supports Haley's (1973) belief that the manifestation of symptoms frequently occurs during transitional stages in the family developmental

life cycle. Viewing a child's first major move into the outside world being achieved in nursery school or kindergarten, Haley (1973) reports:

Conflicts between the parents about child rearing become most manifest when their product is put upon display. Going to school also represents for them their first experience of the fact that their children will ultimately leave home and they will face only each other. It is at this stage that the structure of the family becomes most visible to a therapist consulted because of a child problem. The communication patterns in the family have become habitual, and certain structures are not adaptable to the child's becoming involved outside the family (p. 55).

In this regard, Levenson and Kohn (1965) report that in the drop-out families there had been a long standing history of these students having problems when they began to function in the outside world. Problems which included "separation anxiety, school phobia, or a fear of teachers, or an inability to get along with peers" (p. 419) were reported in the early elementary grades, again at the beginning of junior high school, and also during the last year of high school.

It appears that a child's moving towards the outside world has historically constituted a major threat to the family system of the dropout students. The decision to dropout of college and return home led Levenson (1964a) to conclude:

Contrary to our expectations of greater autonomy and self regulations in the college student, our dropouts may be said to be still operating intra-familias, and the act of leaving school may still have significant reference to the students' role in his family (p. 3).

Conceptualizing these families from a structural family therapy model, the boundaries in the spouse subsystem are rigid, while the boundaries between children and parents, especially mothers, are enmeshed. The term boundaries is not in the psychodynamic model but the

concept is described by Levenson (1965) as the symbiotic relationship of parents, especially between mothers and children. Elaborating further, Levenson (1965) wrote, "The outstanding characteristic of these parents appeared to be a tendency to see their children not as separate people, but as pseudopodic extensions of themselves" (p. 4). From reading Levenson's works, one can hypothesize that the structural family therapy concept of enmeshment seems typical of the dropout family. With diffuse boundaries representative of enmeshed families, children are overinvolved in the parental subsystem and parents are overinvolved in sibling subsystems.

With the emerging systemic conceptualization of the dropout phenomenon, this author is critical that the treatment approach did not become more systemically oriented by treating the family conjointly. Treatment of the students was aimed at giving them understanding and awareness of the systemic influences on their behavior. According to Levenson (1964a), treatment was to give:

. . . the patient a working concept of his behavior as meaningful and functional in its context and relieving his sense of random malfunctioning and alienation. In addition it gives him a frame of reference for viewing his peer relationships and his way of relating himself to authorities out of the home milieu (p. 6).

This awareness may have been helpful to the students in terms of providing a new explanation for their behavior, however, since the family was not treated systemically, the family organization and structure remained unchanged. This is strikingly clear when Levenson (1965) describes the systems reaction when these students returned to college.

Even more notable is the reaction of these families when a student, perhaps after therapy, returns to college. Instead of cheering his resolution, the parents often appear almost resentful; there will be more family rows, more depressions, a younger sister or brother may even start having trouble in school for the first time. Therapists who are instrumental in helping students return to school often note how little their efforts seem to be appreciated by the parents (p. 6).

Another shortcoming of the project was in the reporting of their outcomes. First there was no final report ever written which summarized their findings. During the five years of the project, 235 students were screened and 90 were treated (Levenson et al., 1967). Yet no final statistics are available to indicate what students did educationally or vocationally during or after therapy. The only follow-up data related to continued education was written after the first year of the project when Levenson and Kohn (1964) reported that:

Of the thirty-three patients who remained in therapy for more than five visits, one third have returned to school full time and doing well. Close to half have returned to school in some form and are maintaining themselves successfully. Two others in this group are planning to return in the fall and are likely to make a successful adjustment (p. 4).

As these authors acknowledge, because there were no control groups, there was no way of assessing how many students would have returned to college without psychotherapy.

The limitations in research design and report writing may have resulted because the staff appeared more clinically or treatment oriented than research oriented. For example, two staff members, Akert and Stockhamer (1965), published an article entitled, Countertransference Reactions to College Drop-Outs.

However, even with these limitations, Levenson and his associates

produced beginning relevant data concerning a family systems view of dropout behavior. It has helped support the theoretical conceptualization of a phenomenon which this author initially believed was an original viewpoint.

The value of this author's research project is that it will report the first interviews of college dropout students and their families. Although Levenson came to view dropping out as a systemic response, he never interviewed family members together which limited his ability to assess the family system adequately.

To summarize, this chapter was designed to provide the reader with an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this research. Conceptualizing problematic behavior in the context of the family system is part of a rapidly growing trend in human helping professions. The next chapter will describe the methodology for investigating dropout behavior in the context of a student's family.

C H A P T E R I I I

METHODOLOGY

Description of Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study was the case study approach. This method was utilized because of the descriptive and exploratory nature of this investigation.

This study was descriptive as it analyzed, by means of a structural assessment, the family system of first semester freshmen dropouts. The structural assessment was a description of the family system and how dropout behavior could be conceptualized as functional in the context of the family system. Regarding the descriptive nature of the case study method, Hillway (1969) wrote:

The case study method entails the intensive study of a single individual, several individuals, or a group at one particular time or over a period of time. It uncovers in detail what is true about an individual or group that may bear upon some phases of human behavior. Like those achieved in the typical survey, its results or conclusions are not so much prescriptive as descriptive (p. 45).

This research was exploratory as the literature did not report a similar conceptualization and investigation of the dropout phenomenon. By definition, exploratory research means an investigation into an unknown arena. The case study method has demonstrated its usefulness in exploratory research by generating hypotheses for future research. Until more is known about family interactions and family systems, case studies will serve as an appropriate research design method.

Psychosomatic Families (Minuchin et al., 1978) represents the end result of 10 years of research with 45 families. The "Non Labeled" Families Project at the Mental Research Institute is a current study of "normal" families. Two families have been interviewed at various time intervals during the past five years (Personal conversation with one of the researchers, Dr. McCorkle, July 1979). By design, case studies have provided the opportunity for the intensive study of a limited number of subjects.

An integral part of the methodology of this research was the aid of a research assistant. A doctoral candidate, who was trained in the theory and practice of structural family therapy, also completed a structural assessment on every interviewed family. This assistant, who is currently employed as a family therapist at an adolescent residential treatment facility, had knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of this research. In an attempt not to bias her structural assessments, she was unaware of how this investigator intended to analyze the data.

Selection of Subjects

Most students who intend to drop out of Springfield College, while the college is in session, follow the recommended college policy of reporting to the Dean of Students' Office and obtaining a Withdrawal Procedure Form (see Appendix B). This 10-step procedure form suggests to the student a variety of steps they should follow to ensure an administratively smooth withdrawal. Students are asked to

contact several, if appropriate, college personnel such as the Registrar, Housing Director, and Financial Aid Director. Students are also asked to schedule an exit interview with the Dean of Students or one of his assistants.

When first semester freshmen students scheduled their exit interviews in the Dean of Students' Office, they were told that as part of their exiting process an interview should be scheduled with this researcher. In the presence of the student, a phone call by the Dean's secretary was made to the researcher and an interview was scheduled.

When the student met this investigator, he or she was informed of this researcher's interest in interviewing first semester dropouts and his or her family. Students were told several things about the project: (1) The researcher was not interested in attempting to change the decision about withdrawing, (2) The administration of the college was interested in better understanding the dropout phenomenon, (3) It was part of a doctoral dissertation, (4) The interview could possibly assist the student in communicating to members of their family their reasons for withdrawing, and (5) Since the decision had some effect on everyone in the family, the interview might assist all family members deal with the transition of having the student return home.

After discussing these reasons for the conjoint interview, this researcher asked the student for permission to contact his or her parents or parent. If the student consented, a phone call was made by this researcher that same evening or at some other appropriate time

depending upon parental work schedules. The parents or parent were told the same reasons the student was told for conducting the conjoint interview. If the parents or parent agreed, an interview conducted with as many of the family members that were currently living in the home was held at a convenient time.

When the researcher greeted the family outside of the interviewing room, they were advised that the interview was to be videotaped since it was the only way the data could be collected and analyzed. The family was informed that after the videotapes had been analyzed, they would be erased. After the interview, all members were asked to sign a Consent to Participate Form (see Appendix C).

If during the course of the interview it became apparent to the researcher that the family could benefit from family therapy, the researcher presented this as an alternative. At no time did the investigator enter into a therapy contract with any of the families.

Instrumentation

Every interviewed family was assessed structurally. As this research focused on diagnosing the family system and not treating it, the structural assessments (see Appendix A) included:

1. Establishing the interview.
2. A brief description of the family.
- 3a. Structural map of interviewed members.
- 3b. Hypothesized map of the family (if enough information was provided).
4. Family's developmental stage.

- 5a. Current life context - sources of support.
- 5b. Current life context - sources of stress.
- 6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon?
- 7. Capacity for restructuring.

As this researcher focused on the current transactional patterns in the interview, analysis of the last structural assessment category, capacity for restructuring, was more speculative.

The interview followed the four stages of an initial, problem focused interview as suggested by Haley (1976). The stages included the social, problem, interaction, and goalsetting.

During the social stage, the author joined with all members of the family and obtained a brief family history which included everyone's educational level, job status, and the number of years the parents were married or divorced.

In the problem stage, the following questions were discussed.

- 1. How was the decision made to attend Springfield College?
- 2. How and when did the parent/parents learn about the student's decision to withdraw from Springfield College?
- 3. Why did the parent/parents believe the student wanted to drop out of college?
- 4. What other transitional events such as job change or death occurred in the family during the past year?

In the interaction phase, members were asked to talk to each other about the information elicited during the problem phase of the

interview. In the last stage, the goalsetting, which was modified since the family was not in therapy, family members discussed with each other the following questions.

1. What are the parent/parents' expectations of the student when she/he returns home?
2. What are the student's expectations when she/he returns home?
3. What were the parent/parents' reactions to the student's plans?
4. How could these plans be implemented?

It is critical to note that the questions which were asked of each family were only an attempt to standardize the interview. The questions were only a means to an end. The manner by which the questions were answered provided this researcher the opportunity to assess the interpersonal transactional patterns of the family. As Minuchin (1974) wrote, "A family is a system that operates through transactional patterns. Repeated transactions establish patterns of how, when, and to whom to relate and these patterns underpin the system (p. 51).

Data Collection

Immediately following the interview this researcher completed a structural assessment of the family based upon impressions gained from the interview. Within the next week, the researcher gave the video-taped interview to the research assistant and she completed her independent structural assessment. The only information the researcher told her was the identity of the people in the interview. For example,

on one occasion she was told that the four people in the interview were the dropout student, her mother, and the student's aunt and uncle.

After the research assistant finished her structural assessment, she returned the videotapes to the researcher and a third structural assessment was completed. The researcher wrote the third structural assessment without referring to either his initial assessment or the one completed by the research assistant.

Data Analysis

The data from the structural assessments was examined to discern the patterns of interpersonal transactions in the dropout families, paying particular attention to the families' enmeshment (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin et al., 1978) and the nature of the triadic relationship involving the student and his/her parents (Haley, 1976; Minuchin et al., 1978).

If the dropout families were enmeshed, several observable transactional patterns would emerge. Dyadic communication between members would be incomplete as the boundaries were diffuse, enabling other members to interrupt and enter into the conversation. These intrusions into the conversation would serve to keep open conflict to a minimum as enmeshed families have a low tolerance for conflict. Because of diffuse boundaries, excessive sharing and togetherness would enable members to intrude on the feelings and thoughts of other members. With members answering questions for each other, in effect they would be

reading each other's minds and speaking with authority about each other. This intrusion would be observable at subsystem levels as children were inappropriately overinvolved in the parental subsystem and vice versa. Lastly because of the heightened sense of loyalty and togetherness characteristic of enmeshed families, individual autonomy and differentiation would be impaired (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin et al., 1978).

A student's move away from home to attend college represents a developmental change in the triadic relationship involving the student and his/her parents. As Haley (1976) asserts, "When the child is an adolescent or young adult and has reached the age of leaving home, the parents are actually entering on a new marital contract" (p. 156).

The system's inability to change at this developmental stage may be a result of the rigidity of the triadic relationship between parents and child. If the student has been raised in an environment where he/she has traditionally functioned in the role of conflict defuser, the act of dropping out and returning home may be simultaneously maintaining the preferred patterns of interaction which influenced the dropping out behavior.

The data was analyzed to see if any of the three characteristic patterns of conflict defusing behavior that involve children were present in the dropout families. These triadic interactional sequences identified by Minuchin et al. (1978) are triangulation, parent-child coalition, and detouring. In both triangulation and parent-child coalitions, the child is openly pressed to ally with one parent against

the other as the parents are in conflict or in opposition (Minuchin et al., 1978). In triangulation the child is in shifting alliances so that at times it is child and mother against father while at other times it is the child and father who are against mother. In a parent-child coalition, the alliance is stable and always excludes the same parent, for example, mother and child against father. In the pattern of detouring, the parental conflicts are submerged as the spouses present a united front in either their support or attack against the child. In effect parental conflicts and concerns are "detoured" through the child.

Also included in the data analysis were the similarities and differences between the three structural assessments. Trends or themes in the dropout families were analyzed. Finally, because of the exploratory nature of this case study research, unexpected data emerged. This emergent data was also reported.

C H A P T E R I V

RESULTS

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter is divided in seven major sections. Each of the six interviewed families are presented in separate sections, one through six; one being the first family interviewed and six being the last. These six major sections, each representing one specific family, will be organized in the following manner. The reader will be presented with three structural assessments which were written on every family. The first assessment, based on the interview, was written by the researcher immediately following the interview. The second structural assessment was completed by the research assistant after her independent analysis of the videotapes. The third structural assessment was written by this researcher after analyzing the videotapes. Included in this last assessment will be edited transcripts of the interview.

The purpose of the edited transcripts is to present the transactional evidence used in the development of the structural assessments. To assist the reader, the transcripts of the interviews will be on the left side of the page and the researcher's comments and analysis will be on the right side. As the transcripts were edited, the word END demarcates the chosen sequences.

A presentation of the similarities and differences between the three structural assessments completed on each family will be included.

The reader is reminded that there are other methods of analyzing the interview, but this research investigation was limited to the structural assessment. The seventh and final major section of this chapter will be an integration of the findings from the six cases.

With this organization in mind, three structural assessments, and a presentation of their similarities and differences, follows in Section I, the Johnson-Smith family.*

*During the fall semester, 17 students reported to the Dean of Students' Office and either indicated that they were dropping out immediately or at the end of the fall semester. Of these 17 students, 7 dropped out during the semester and 10 withdrew after completing the semester. Interviews with the researcher were scheduled with all 17 students and 15 students kept the appointment. Fifteen families were contacted by the researcher.

Of the 7 students who withdrew during the semester, 6 met with the researcher. One family was from South Carolina and did not plan to come to Springfield. In one other case, by the time the researcher was able to contact the family at 11:00 p.m., one parent had already left to bring the student home. Consequently, only 4 of the 7 students who left during the semester participated in the study.

Of the 10 students who withdrew at the end of the semester, 9 met with the researcher. Two of the 10 contacted families participated in the interview. One family cancelled the scheduled conjoint interview because of weather conditions and never contacted the researcher to reschedule an interview. One family was from Florida and did not plan to come to Springfield. The 5 remaining families, who planned to come to the campus to bring their children home after final exams, said they would consider meeting with the researcher. None of these families contacted the researcher at the office or at home to schedule an interview.

Section I - Johnson-Smith Family

Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On Friday, September 21, 1979, the researcher received a call from the secretary in the Dean of Students' Office reporting that Steven Johnson was leaving college immediately. At a meeting that afternoon, this researcher explained the project and Steven agreed to participate. His mother was called that afternoon and she agreed to come to the interview which was scheduled the next day. She had indicated that it would be impossible for other family members to attend, however when she arrived, she was accompanied by Steven's stepfather, Mr. Smith.

2. Description of the family. The Johnson-Smith family consisted of Mrs. Mary Smith and her five children from her previous marriage with Mr. Johnson. There were two daughters, Linda and Gloria, both in their early twenties, Steven the dropout student, age 19, and two younger sons, Dennis, age 16 and Eric, age 12. Mrs. Smith was divorced in 1974 after 20 years of marriage. She remarried Mr. John Smith in 1975 and they separated in 1976. Though separated, they both reported having strong positive feelings towards each other and that they saw each other often.

It was reported in the interview that Mrs. Smith's former husband, Mr. Johnson, remarried Mr. John Smith's former wife. The following genogram was included to assist in visualizing this

arrangement.

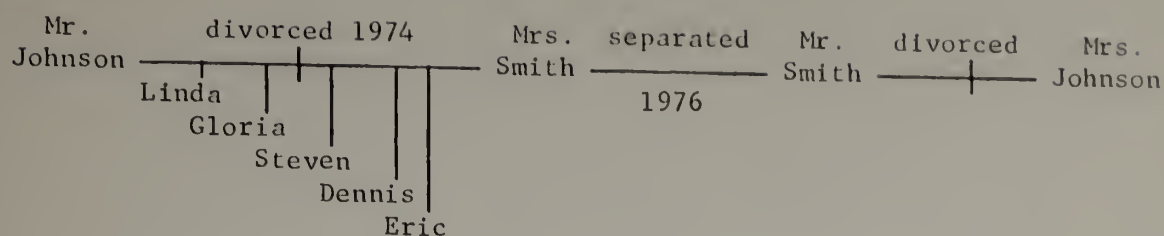


Fig. 2. Genogram of Johnson-Smith family.

Approximately a year ago, Steven, Dennis, and Eric moved from their mother's home to live with their biological father, Mr. Johnson. He resided in a neighboring community to Mrs. Smith's home. Steven returned to his mother's after a few weeks, Dennis returned after approximately three months, and according to Mrs. Smith, Eric was expected to return home very soon. The researcher was not informed if there were any children in Mr. Smith's first marriage.

For the past eight years, Mrs. Smith had worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse and, within the past year, she had returned to school to earn her Registered Nurses' degree. She was currently working full time and going to school full time. Mr. Smith was employed as a salesman for an engineering company. An 82 year old great aunt was currently living with Mrs. Smith and, though ambulatory, required some daily assistance. Linda and Gloria were not living at home. Mrs. Smith lived approximately two hours away from Springfield College.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Steven ≡ Mrs. Smith | Mr. Smith

This map indicated an overinvolved relationship between Steven and

his mother. It also placed him in the executive subsystem. Mr. Smith's relationship with Steven and Mrs. Smith was indicated by a rigid boundary.

3b. Hypothesized map of Johnson-Smith family based on interview data. There was not enough interactional data provided to speculate clearly about the nature of the relationships among other family members.

4. Family's developmental stage. It was somewhat difficult to specifically identify one particular developmental stage for this family because, in the past several years, there had been a divorce, courtship, remarriage, separation, and the single parent role for Mrs. Smith. If Mrs. Smith were still married, the middle marriage stage would be the most appropriate classification since the family was negotiating the launching of adolescents and the aging of a member from an older generation.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. Based on the interview, it appeared there were few sources of support. Reluctantly this researcher was told that a clinical psychologist had assisted the family at various times during the past 10 years. This help had been given to several of the children for non-specified behavioral problems in school and also to Steven to help him adjust to his mother and father's divorce.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. From the initial phone conversation with Mrs. Smith, it was apparent there was a lot of stress within the family. She, because of her work and school

schedule, had not slept during the past 40 hours. She was expecting the youngest child to return home from his biological father's home because "things were not working out". Over the phone she stated she was upset about Steve's decision to withdraw from college and maintained that his 16 year old girlfriend, whose family was opposed to the relationship, was influential in his decision to return home.

Clearly there was stress over living arrangements as the children were back and forth between Mrs. Smith's home and Mr. Johnson's.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? The interview suggested that the boundaries between Steve and his mother were diffuse. There was a clear, strong alliance between these two individuals which supported a lack of differentiation. It was suggested that to return home and commute to another college would help support Mrs. Smith's incompetence and place Steven in a position of centrality within the family. Steven was surprised to see his stepfather at the interview and Mrs. Smith said it would be up to Steven if Mr. Smith participated.

It was speculated that the entire family had difficulty leaving their original families with children moving back and forth and the adults remaining involved with their former spouses. For example, Steven reported that he returned home because he couldn't get along with his stepmother who was the former wife of his stepfather.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Because of the desire to experience the family system as it presented itself, this researcher did

not attempt to restructure the family system. This writer experienced the family as being very rigid. Open conflict about Steve's decision to drop out was clearly minimized. It seemed that the decision to withdraw will only function to rigidify the system and Steve's critical role as leader of the family.

Section I - Johnson-Smith Family

Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant* after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

2. Description of the family. Three people actually came to the interview: Steven, about 19, his mother, Mrs. Mary Smith (probably in her 40's), and Mr. John Smith, Steven's stepfather (in his late 40's). However, as the interview progressed, it was clear that there were many other members of this family that were involved. Steven had just dropped out of his freshman year at Springfield College. His mother, Mary, had been working as a nurse for the last eight years and she went back to school last spring to get her R.N. Mary's second husband, John, was a salesman in an engineering firm for the last 20 years. Before Steven came to Springfield College in September, he was living at home with his mother, his younger brother, Dennis (16), and Mary's 82 year old great aunt. Mary and John were separated for three years, and while they did not live together, they remained in contact and saw each other often. Mary was divorced from Steven's father in 1974. Steven's father remarried John's ex-wife, and then Mary married John.

Steven's 12 year old brother was living with Steven's father and John's ex-wife. Steven also had two sisters, Linda and Gloria. Linda lived in the Midwest and Gloria lived at her father's sister's house.

*The research assistant's writing style differed from the researcher's style as she often listed her observations instead of writing complete sentences.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Mr. Smith | Mrs. Smith ≡ Steven

3b. Hypothesized map of Johnson-Smith family based on interview data.

Mr. Smith | Mrs. Smith ≡ Steven
 // //
 Steven's father
 and
 stepmother

The overinvolvement of Mary and Steven was evidenced by:

- A. Most of the session they faced each other and looked at each other. Even when John was talking, they rarely turned to him.
- B. Mother and son together earned for Steven's college. As Steven put it, they were shelling out the money for nothing.
- C. Throughout the session, their hand movement was mirrored back and forth between the two of them.
- D. Mary frequently overruled something that Steven said (about 6-7 times).
- E. At the end of the tape, Steven picked up his mother's pocket-book and waited for her, much like a boyfriend.

The rigid boundary between John and the rest of the family was evidenced by:

- A. During the bulk of the session John sat twiddling his thumbs and with head down. Several times he looked at his watch very pointedly.
- B. Often when John did talk, Mary looked at Steven.

- C. Mary spoke for John several times, cutting out his responses to questions the researcher asked.
- D. John and Mary never talked with each other in the session and when John discussed Steven's problems, he talked about Steven rather than with him.

The evidence for the conflict between Steven and his father and his stepmother was based on his self report and the fact that he moved from their home. The evidence for the conflict between Mary and her first husband was based on the fact that they got divorced.

4. Family's developmental stage. This was a family in the middle marriage stage with the added stress of a divorce, remarriage and separation in a short period of time, as well as the stress of the mother expanding her career goals. With Mary's grandfather's sister living in the home, the family was dealing directly with the aging of the older generation. There also seemed to be a lot of contact with the maternal grandfather. (Steven was talking with him the evening before the session, and his grandfather was telling Steven about the early stages of his parents' marriage).

The research assistant questioned how this family had dealt with appropriate teenage responsibility and independence as Steven seemed overly responsible in some areas (i.e. earning money for school) and irresponsible in other areas (i.e. day to day things like doing laundry).

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

- A. Steven's high school basketball coach.

B. Family's clinical psychologist.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

A. Money.

B. Mother worked a double shift.

C. The divorce, remarriage and separation.

D. A lot of moving, kids going from house to house.

E. Steven leaving college.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? The research assistant had several hypotheses. One was that Steven as the oldest son was now providing (by moving back home) a "marriage" with his mother after the other two men went off and left her. Another hypothesis was that he was in a loyalty bind with the unique problems that arise when two blended families are "joined" by a previous marriage. In his loyalty bind, he might have been proving that Mom was "right" and the good parent by returning home to her.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Fair. There were not many restructuring moves done in the session (as this was not the focus of the session), so there was not too much data to assess this.

Section I - Johnson-Smith Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to the researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family.

Mr. Smith | Mrs. Smith ≡ Steven

The map indicated the overinvolved, enmeshed relationship between Steven and his mother. Their alliance was strong and stable as they sat close and often laughed together. The map also showed a rigid boundary between Mr. Smith and the subsystem of Mrs. Smith and Steven. Mr. Smith sat apart from Mrs. Smith and Steven, and was very quiet. The configuration appeared repeatedly and represented the predominant interactional pattern in the family. What follows are two transcripts which provide the interactional data for this configuration.

Whiting: How about the decision to come to Springfield? How was that made in a sense? How much, what did that look like? How did that go? How were people involved in that?

Mrs. Smith: I don't really think there was that much of a decision involved, you asked if we'd come, and I thought perhaps there might be able to, at that time did not have contact with Steven, I didn't talk with him till about eight o'clock last night.

Whiting: No, no, the decision to

Mrs. Smith: Oh, for Steven (reaches and pats Steven's knee) to come to Springfield.

Whiting: Ya, ya.

Mrs. Smith: Well, he'd always wanted to.

Steven: Um, this is true. I, I've always inter, as I told you before, I've always been interested in coaching and things like that, and when I came up, you know, it was still the thing I wanted to do, but, ah, after seeing the dormitory life and being away for a while and, you know, knees, and things just weren't going the way I, I expected and, and I just didn't, you know, after the first week I like, didn't have a hate, but I was negative toward the place, and then it just kept building, building, building, and I didn't like a couple of the courses that were in the curriculum, and I said, I talked with the bursar to see how much money I could get back, and she said and she gave me a good figure, and that's it. But I might be able to get to go into another college and see, you know, if they have a better set up for me.

Steven changed the topic from his decision to attend Springfield to his decision to leave. This suggested that it may be difficult to complete transactions in the family.

Whiting: But how about the decision to come here, like was that something you have been planning

The researcher reasked the original question.

Steven: Ah.

Whiting: last year or like in the spring, or did you folks come up to the school at all or, I'm just wondering how that went?

Steven: Ah basically, I've always wanted to come here because I always heard it was the best P.E. (physical education) school in New England, and, ah, it was basically on my own with my

The decision to attend college seemed to have been made without the assistance of his family.

basketball coach, you know, we went up here a couple of times.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And ah, I liked the campus on the outside like when I started coming and stuff, and ah the basketball coach was, ah he was a nice man, he came down and saw, saw one of the games I played, and it was all right, that was the basic reason why I came down.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: If I didn't get accepted here, I don't know where I would have went.

Whiting: O.K. How? Were you involved in that decision at all, John?

Mr. Smith: (Shakes head) No, // * I was

Mrs. Smith: No.

Whiting: O.K.

Mr. Smith: Mary was //

Mrs. Smith: This is where he wanted to come. There was no decision involved, this was it.

Whiting: O.K. There weren't like other schools that were kind of checked out or into and

Mrs. Smith: No.

Whiting: O.K. It was a sense that this is where Steven wanted to be.

John was quiet the first several minutes so an attempt was made to see how he was involved with Steven. Mrs. Smith moved quickly to block his involvement.

This sequence raised some questions about how decisions were made in this family.

* // The conversation between the slashes indicated that members were speaking simultaneously. Whenever this occurred, slashes were indicated in the excerpts.

How did you first know that, ah,
Steven was feeling like he didn't want
to be here?

Mrs. Smith: He came home at the end of
orientation week,

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: And said that he didn't
like it, and I said well I, it's
orientation week.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: Give things a chance to
calm down a little bit. It's not like
classes have started and things will
get better.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: But apparently to him they
didn't. (Steven and mother laugh)

Whiting: Were you surprised to hear
that?

Mrs. Smith: Yes I was, really very much,
I thought he would enjoy himself up
here.

Steven: She thought I was a partying
person. (laughs)

Mrs. Smith: No, no, I don't mean that
at all, but I thought he would enjoy
the life. Now let me ask you this.
If you didn't have an outside involve-
ment, do you think that you would feel
differently?

Steven: (Pause) I would have

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) I mean
that's part // this

Steven: That's part of it too.

Since Mrs. Smith blocked
the researcher's ques-
tion directed to Mr.
Smith, the researcher
decided to go through
Mrs. Smith for infor-
mation as an attempt to
join the system.

First clue of their
alliance.

The diffuse boundary
between Steven and his
mother began to appear
as she essentially asked
his permission to ask
Steven an indirect ques-
tion, interrupted him
and answered for him.

Mrs. Smith: whole thing. //

Steven: But, I still, I probably would have not have done as well in classes and things cause I wouldn't have gotten any sleep cause I still, I haven't, I haven't gotten any sleep until last night. I've been getting four or five hours sleep every night and that's not

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) That's terrific. (mother and Steven laugh)

Steven: Oh she, she works double shifts and wakes up at six o'clock in the morning and goes back // till eleven at night.

Mrs. Smith: I work nights. //

Steven: Ya.

Whiting: When you said outside involvement, and I'm not sure, ah

Steven: Oh.

Whiting: It sounded like, what

Steven: My, ah, girlfriend.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: Fiancee, hopefully. Right now we have plans to get married.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: Which, ah, her parents are very strict and, you know, it's just that we got attached that's all, and my mother went through it with my first father, my real father, and my, well the thing I got from it, I talked with my grandfather last night, that, ah, my father went three years to college, and his senior year he screwed up because of my mother cause he was trying

Mrs. Smith and Steven continued to interrupt each other and speak simultaneously. They interacted in a very playful way with each other, again suggesting diffuse boundaries characteristic of enmeshment.

The researcher moved for clarity and readdressed the issue as the topic had changed.

The researcher attempted to bring some clarity to the discussion before Steven went off on a tangent.

to work and do everything else and this and that and he screwed up, and it took him like a couple of additional years just to get his degree cause he screwed up his last year.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And didn't graduate until a couple of years later.

Whiting: Is that, do you recall that?

Mrs. Smith: Well, it was a few years later than that, he just wasn't interested in obtaining his degree. As far as Steve's dad was concerned, college was just a waste of time. And, ah, with a great deal of nagging, (laughs) he finally did go back and get it.

Whiting: Uh huh, so you're saying there is some precedent for dropping out of school, ah, based on relationships, ah and how people are involved.

Steven: Ya, there is. Ya, you can't be, you know, people say go out and, you know, you go here and the person you love is there, and then you go, you do school, but four years from now everything will be really great and everything else, and you go back and everything will be fine. You start missing, and you feel lonely and then things start building up if things aren't perfect you'll still feel lonely, you still not quite the way you should, and then if you have any other bad influences like maybe not enough sleep like I didn't get, people, you know, teachers, teachers were nice around here, but like the curriculum I didn't agree with and just little things kept on coming at me, and I just got worse and worse and then I said, you know.

Mrs. Smith: What bothered you about the curriculum, Steven?

Steven: Physics, Man in Society,

Steven spoke for his mother which again was evidence of their enmeshed relationship.

What had started out with mother asking about Steven's girlfriend had moved to concerns about the curriculum. This inability of members to complete transactions and bring closure to topics was characteristic of enmeshment.

those were two courses I believe did not belong in the curriculum. I can see some parts of physics, but ah, basically, it, I don't believe it belongs in the physical education field, only if you adapt it to the movements of an athlete.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And I didn't like that either. I mean I'm not trying to put my standards upon the school, but you know, school is tough enough without having extra things put upon it.

Whiting: Were you aware that say what your curriculum would look like as a freshman?

Steven: I didn't get it till maybe three weeks before school started.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: And an, I don't know whose fault that was, I

Whiting: Did you have, had you had a catalogue or?

Steven: I, it could have been the fault of, um, my counselors at high school, they weren't very good, it's, if it wasn't for my basketball coach, I don't think I would have seen the place, but ah, you know, I didn't know what my courses were going to be.

The researcher was interested in Steven's knowledge about what to expect in his curriculum. His answer raised questions about how or whether Mr. or Mrs. Smith were able to guide or influence him.

END*

Whiting: How about you John, did you, how did you become aware that Steven was either wanting to go home or not happy here or?

*The reader is reminded that the word END appears at the conclusion of every edited excerpt.

Mr. Smith: Well, I discussed it with her last night.

Whiting: O.K. So last night was the first time you were aware

Mr. Smith: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) Oh he was aware that Steven was not too happy up here, but we didn't realize that things had come to a head until you

Mr. Smith: (Interrupting) Well, it was just that point in time you mentioned about the indoctrination week, and we both said the same thing. Well, you know, who the hell knows it's so early. How could anybody judge at that point in time, but no point did Steven express a strong desire to say that he was going to leave until yesterday, at least that's when I found out.

Whiting: O.K.

Mr. Smith: He decided to pack it in.

Mrs. Smith: Did you write that letter Sunday night when you got home? (mother and Steven smile at each other)

Steven: No, it was Monday.

Mrs. Smith: I can't believe that the mails are that efficient. (laughs) I received it Tuesday.

Steven: Did you get, get your birthday card?

Mrs. Smith: Yes dear, I did.

Steven: See.

Mrs. Smith: Thank you.

Steven: They're efficient. I sent

Another attempt was made to see how Mr. Smith was involved with the family and Mrs. Smith spoke for him. This seemed to support his disengaged position in the family.

Mrs. Smith changed the conversation dramatically. The overcloseness of their relationship was demonstrated and the system was maintained.

the birthday card Friday, and it got there, what? The mails are quick.

Mrs. Smith: No, it must have been Thursday, it came yesterday. Today is Saturday, right?

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: I don't know, Friday morning.

Whiting: But, but you were aware that at the end of orientation that Steven was feeling kind of

The researcher attempted to redirect the conversation back to Mr. Smith.

Mrs. Smith: (Inaudible)

Whiting: ambivalent.

Mrs. Smith: The whole thing. (laughs)

Mr. Smith: Well he said, ah, that he was a little unhappy. It's, I don't think it's unusual.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: A young man leaves home and gets in with a new surroundings, and, ah, you have to adapt, and, ah, I don't see anything unusual about that.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: So I didn't think it was that, you know, ah

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) I really didn't attribute to anything in the curriculum at that time.

Once again Mrs. Smith blocked Mr. Smith by interrupting and spoke for Steven, and the system was maintained.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: I felt that it was just that he missed Cheryl.

Steven: (Pause, smiles) Might as well blame it on her.

Mrs. Smith: I'm not trying to blame,
you never said anything about the
curriculum.

Steven: Well, I just (pause), it's
nothing against the school or any-
thing, but, you know, people have
come out of here that have been very
smart and everything. I've seen
people, good P.E. teachers that have
come out of here and, you know, they
are very knowledgeable, but I, I'm
disenchanted with the school.

Steven once again
responded in a vague
way showing the diffi-
culty members have
completing trans-
actions.

Whiting: Uh huh. .

Steven: And that's the way I feel,
you know, there's nothing that can be
changed.

END

The question about other transitional events in the family provided the researcher with some information about other family members and their relationships with each other. In these two excerpts, the reader will see again, even more dramatically, the nature of the relationships between the interviewed members. Mr. Smith remained disengaged while Steven was overinvolved with his mother in the parental subsystem. The reader will also see that the researcher made several attempts to have the family complete transactions and stay with the presenting concerns.

Whiting: How about, have there been
other kinds of transitional events,
happenings with the last year in the
family?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, we seem to come and
go. (laughs, looks to Steven)

Steven: It's been a long one.

After being non-
verbally prompted by
his mother, Steven
spoke for the family.

Whiting: How do you mean?

Steven: Between, we have five
(pause) children, well not children,
five people plus

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) Siblings.
(mother laughs, Steven laughs)

Steven: My mother and my father and
John also. And

Whiting: And who?

Steven: And John, and now if I told
you this story, you wouldn't believe
me. (mother and son grinning, looking
at each other)

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs) Yes, he will,
tell him, it's not the first time it's
happened.

Steven: Yes. John's ex-wife is
married now to my father.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: And they live in (names
town). And John and my mother are,
were married, now they are separated.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: But that's the transaction,
and we have myself, my brother Dennis,
my sister Gloria, and my brother Eric.
All, we were like a merry-go-round from
(names town) to (names town). You know,
on and off weekends to, for visiting and
sometimes staying.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And, ah, right now my sister
was a discipline problem for my father
in (names town) and so they brought her
to my father's sister's house in (names
another town) to live up there for a

Mother and son's non-verbal behavior of smiling and paying a lot of attention to each other was very apparent. This interactional data suggested a strong, stable alliance.

The diffuse boundaries in the parental subsystem enabled Steven to be the family spokesperson and authority on the other children.

while to get her calmed down.

Mrs. Smith: Well, it didn't quite work like that Steven.

Steven: (Interrupting) But, ah,

Mrs. Smith: It was Gloria's decision.

Steven: // Ya, Gloria wanted to

Mrs. Smith: Gloria wanted to //

Steven: Gloria wanted to go up there.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: So, you know, there's been a lot of transaction.

Mrs. Smith: You forgot your other sister. (mother laughs, Steven smiles)

Steven: Oh, my sister Linda, who lives now in (names State), I think, unless she moved back to (names State) again.

Mrs. Smith: No, she didn't.

Steven: She's been doing bee-lines from (State) to (State) for the past couple of years, back and forth, you know, so everybody is moving around, there's been a lot of weird things happening, and we're just trying to hang in there. (laughs) You know life isn't easy. (laughs)

Whiting: So that you'd say within the last year, or would you say the last year or the last several years there's been, ah, it's kind of

Mrs. Smith: Ah, it's been primarily the last year, there's been so much shuttling.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Again Steven was prompted to speak for the family and demonstrated his involvement in the parental subsystem.

The researcher shifted the focus back to Mrs. Smith in an attempt to have her speak as the authority of the family. Steven almost immediately became the focus and again the researcher addressed Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith: A year ago the boys decided they wanted to go to (names town) to stay with their dad. And Steven, you were just there not too long a time, few months, and then he came back to (names town).

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: And has been there ever since until, you know, it was time for school.

Whiting: Did, did, do you have custody of the children?

Mrs. Smith: I have legal custody of all the children.

Whiting: O.K., O.K., so that was something that was kind of negotiated with your husband, former husband, to, that he would take the children for a while.

Negotiate seemed like a foreign word in this family. Members did not discuss business directly with each other.

Mrs. Smith: Well, ah, that's where they wanted to be.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: I certainly wasn't going to fight it.

Whiting: O.K. And it sounds like people have filtered back at, at different times from that.

Mrs. Smith seemed stressed about her children's moving around and demonstrated her difficulty guiding and influencing her children.

Mrs. Smith: Uh huh.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: Dennis has come back now, but ah, after a year down there, and I expect Eric momentarily.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: Like this weekend. (laughs)

END

Whiting: It seemed like, ah, everyone was, I don't know, talking about the close connections in terms of where the adults are, ah, in almost, ah, there's some kidding about it, is that how that's viewed in some ways or is that, like Steven was talking about like he

Mrs. Smith: Well, it is a little difficult to cope with sometimes. I think, especially for the children.

Steven: You can't, you can't really, think, really you can't let it get into your head too much or you start, you know, going crazy. Cause the person that my father got married to was, when I knew her, she was very nice, very polite, and thinking about you, and about myself and about, you know, the rest of the boys.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And then as soon as she got married, and as soon as my father and her got married, ah, she turned over, she, there's a bad side to her, and that's why Dennis is back. My beef was with my father.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And that's why I left. You know he tried to, ah, run my life. See he, he has a pact now with my brother Eric that says, ah, I'm taking care of you now, and you just listen to what I have to say until you get out of high school, and once you leave me, that's it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: You know, ah, I'll wish the best for you, and ah, but I'll help you if you can, but don't, you know, actually come here. He says he's gonna help you, but there's like a backing behind it in a

Mrs. Smith deferred immediately to Steven. Repeatedly the enmeshed quality of their relationship appeared.

With the opportunity to speak for the family, Steven demonstrated his knowledge of relationships between other family members.

The boundaries between the siblings appeared diffuse.

sense, he, he probably won't.

Whiting: O.K. There's some real kind of doubt there about what that's support would be or look like.

Steven: Ya, he's just trying to get us into college, you know, he didn't, you know, the only person that really had contacts with Springfield was my basketball coach.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: No, there was no, he was probably the only one.

Whiting: What's it look like now the, in terms of, ah, Steven coming home, ah, you know, what, where are we going from here, what does that look like in terms of

Mrs. Smith: I don't know where we're going.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: Do you know where we are going here?

Steven: I think I do. I, when I get back, ah, I'm going to (names university near home town), look up the baseball coach, talk to him, find out what I have to do to get in, who I have to see to get in, to find out the curriculum, the activities, not the activities, the, ah, different majors and things.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And hopefully I can get into there. If I can't, ah, my other resort would be (names community college) where I can study there for two years, get an associate degree in something, and, ah, move onto another college.

The system was maintained as Steven was in the parental subsystem speaking as the family authority. This sequence also showed that Steven had a difficult time having his needs met as a child in this family. It was as if he was never in the sibling subsystem.

The system was maintained again as Mrs. Smith deferred to Steven.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: Or take the associate's degree and go into a company or something.

Whiting: Uh huh. Any reactions to those kinds of ideas, plans?

Mrs. Smith: (She and Steven smile) Well, are you planning on living at home?

Steven: Hopefully.

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs) If mother will let you in.

Steven: (Laughs) If mother will let me in. (pause)

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs) A boarding house. (smiling)

Steven: I'll sleep on the roof. (mother and Steven laugh) (pause) I don't know

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs) Have you thought about how Cheryl's parents are going to view all this?

Steven: (Deep sigh) Well, ah, I can see it.

Whiting: Well, wait, maybe you could stay with that one for a minute. Um, is living at home an option? Is that, ah,

Steven: I was hoping I could, I didn't feel I like could, um, if

Mrs. Smith: It's no problem.

Steven: If

Mrs. Smith: I mean if that's what you mean, that's no problem.

The sequence showed the difficulty Mrs. Smith and Steven had dealing directly with each other. The boundaries were such that Mrs. Smith and Steven appeared unable to relate as mother in the parental subsystem and Steven in the sibling subsystem, as they related as two peers.

Unable to speak directly with each other, the topic was changed and the system was maintained.

The researcher attempted to return to the question of Mrs. Smith's reactions and Steven answered. Once again the diffuseness of the boundaries was demonstrated.

Steven: If, you know, if

Whiting: I didn't know if that was negotiable or

Mrs. Smith: No, I was just, I didn't know if he was planning on coming home or going out and getting his own apartment or what.

Steven: Well, if ma was mad at me, I, I didn't think she would be, I think she would be disappointed but my idea was

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) I'm not either really either Steven, I want what's best for you, and I hope you can find it. (laughs)

Steven: (Smiles) Not until I'm thirty-five, I'll find it, or something. No, but ah, if you know, ma was mad, I'm just saying I this is a back up. I didn't think so but if not, I could have gotten a job and then looked up the colleges and lived somewhere.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: Cause, ah, I've a lot you know, I'd have a lot of other people, I'm not saying my mother was, is going to take me up, but just I know a lot of people that, ah, I could have used for back up.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: Just in case you know, I'm, I'm a likeable person, it's not like, ah, all the kids hated me around here at school, they didn't. But ah, the kid, up, some of the kids, knew it, some of the kids knew I was un unhappy with it, but, you know, well, ah, my two room-mates were really good guys, ah, but they knew I wasn't hap, I wasn't happy with it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And, ah, they weren't surprised.

Whiting: O.K. So it sounds like your plan is to move in.

Steven: Uh huh.

Whiting: Ah, how, how will that work?

Steven: (Looks to his mother and smiles)

Mrs. Smith: What do you mean, how will that work? (smiles)

Steven: (Smiling) It's worked before. (laughs)

Whiting: O.K. Do you have certain expectations, I guess, of, you know, for Steven to move in.

Mrs. Smith: A few.

Steven: (Interrupting) If I don't burn the house down, I'll be all right. (smiles)

Mrs. Smith: Only if you don't burn the house down, ah, he's going to have to pitch in a little bit.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: Cleaning up after myself.

Mrs. Smith: Ya, that would be a help. (smiles)

Whiting: Would that, is that something that would be new or different or

Mrs. Smith: Oh well, he's a little negligent sometimes. (laughs)

Steven: (Laughs) Picking up, you mean. Like I always have a problem putting all my dirty clothes in one pile

Steven and Mrs. Smith's interactions highlighted the difficulty these two members had dealing directly with each other and completing transactions. Every attempt the researcher made to restructure the hierarchy, with Mrs. Smith being appropriately in charge, was resisted strongly and the system maintained itself. Mrs. Smith's and Steven's alliance was strong and stable.

and leaving them to ferment for a while. (mother and son laugh)

Whiting: Kind of a little nest in the corner.

Steven: Ya.

Mrs. Smith: Everybody walks around them. (laughs)

Steven: Brown spot, hay that's where Steven puts

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) Then he howls if he doesn't have any clean clothes.

Steven: Ya, cause they're all stuck up together. That's good. My car is nothing but dirty clothes in it now. Ah, but ah, I know what the job situation is that's probably, that's another factor why, that's tied in with leaving Springfield, was I could have switched, I was going to switch my major.

The inability to stay with the issues at hand was repeatedly demonstrated. After several unsuccessful attempts were made by the researcher to have Mrs. Smith and Steven stay on track, the researcher chose not to challenge the system and let it maintain itself as Steven changed the subject.

Dramatic topic switches appeared to be a way to defuse any potential conflict.

END

The researcher was aware of Mr. Smith's distance and his lack of involvement in the interview. Previous attempts to bring him in had been blocked by Mrs. Smith. The researcher wanted to see what could happen with another attempt to include him in the interview.

Whiting: John, do you have, I'm feeling like I'm leaving you out, and I want to bring you in some way. Um, do you have some reaction to Steven moving in? Do you feel like you are in a position at this point to offer suggestions or advice or feeling like that's something he and his mother have to work out?

To join with Mr. Smith, the researcher took the blame for his exclusion.

Mr. Smith: Well, ah, I agree with Mary, I think that, ah, you know, moving home is no problem, of course not.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: (Deep sigh) I think, ah, we both feel that what's best for Steven is what we're both like to have Steve, you know, do or have or whatever.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: As I say, I'm not in a position to, ah, try to, ah, direct him in his decisions, he has to make his own, he's a young man now.

This statement seemed to support his disengaged position in the family.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: Ah, I can reflect back on my, what happened to me, and, ah, relate that to him possibly, you know, if he can draw on that, then when he makes his decisions, understand that these things happen. I married very early, nineteen, and, ah, it kept me out of a lot of things.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: And I can understand his feeling right now very much. At the time I got married, was not the type of thing I wanted to do, it was the reverse situation, but I can understand how he feels now.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: Cause again I felt the same way about it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: But unfortunately it was

a long time coming when I finally met his mother, and found what, really found what love was all about.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: It took too long getting there. Ah, I think Steve is a, he pointed out himself, he blows his own horn once in a while and says he's likeable, he is, he's also smart, and I think his mother and I would like to see him work. Ah, gain his full potential because we had to, each of us, his mother and I, wait much later in life to get that.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: There was so much in between we missed and so much in between we could have gotten. We just want the best for him, that's all.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: Simple as that. He has to make his own decisions, he's a young man. And he needs help, he knows where to turn for it.

Whiting: And it sounds like, ah, that as a young person and being involved with someone you felt like you loved at the time

Mr. Smith: It's very strong feelings.

Whiting: Yup, and it sounds like you feel

Mr. Smith: (Interrupting) And I can understand how he feels. I can understand it one hundred percent. But, ah, like I said, I can sympathize with him. I can sympathize with him because I know a little more about it. Some of the things Steve is going through emotionally and he's found someone who

Initially Steven and his mother looked at Mr. Smith. By now, Steven and his mother looked alternately between the floor and each other. It was as if they were not even hearing Mr. Smith. The boundary between Mr. Smith and the stable, allied subsystem of Mrs. Smith and Steven was very rigid.

he can love, and that's a great feeling.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: And I think he has a lot of love to give, and I think that he can do that, I'm just hoping that he can, you know, take to the, to a point where he can achieve what he wants, to achieve in life and still be able to love, cause that's very important. It sounds like I'm talking around the issue. Well maybe I am because I am not here to try and tell him what to do. Ah, I just want him to understand. I hope he will, that if anytime I can be of help to him in any way. No one ever see him go down. He says well if I can come home. (mother and Steven smile and laugh together) I don't think there was ever any doubt in his mind that he could come home. Wouldn't want him any place else but home, that's where he belongs. But he has two people that love him.

Mr. Smith again maintained his disengaged position as he minimized his own influence.

Mr. Smith supported Steven's decision to leave college.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mr. Smith: And he doesn't have to knock his brains out to say I need help, or can I talk to ya, he can anytime he pleases, we'll give him all the support he needs, hopefully. I guess that's about it.

Whiting: (Non-verbally, with his hands gesturing for Steven to comment to Mr. Smith)

Steven: I'm in good shape. (mother and Steven laugh) Well, not really. If I had a degree in, if I was a doctor or something, things might be better, you know.

The researcher non-verbally directed Steven to comment to his step-father, and the enmeshed mother-son relationship appeared.

Mrs. Smith: You don't want to be a doctor.

Steven: I know I don't want to be a doctor, I worked

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) We know how nasty they are.

Steven: I worked in the O.R. this summer, that's

Mr. Smith: (Interrupting) I think Steve you could be anything you wanted to be if you set your mind to it without any problem whatsoever. All you have to do is decide this is what I want to do and go to it, because I, I saw what you did in just two short years, and you went from, ah, maybe a C student to high honors, and you worked and you worked hard. You played basketball, and he did real well there in his two years in high school, and, you know, he was just kind of floating along there, just one of the crowd, and all of a sudden wham, and he put himself to work, and he did a super job, a super job, and played ball too. And coached the girls' basketball team, I don't know why he picked the girls, but that's all right. (everyone laughs)

It was interesting to see Mr. Smith assert himself with Steven and then defuse the impact of his comments with humor.

Steven: Had to, Cheryl was on it.

Mr. Smith: Oh great, now we find out.
(laughs)

Steven: And plus running (town A) to (town B) every day which was not an easy thing. I went to, it's unbelievable, things (inaudible). Going to a school in (town B) and living in (town A) for about three months, something like that.

Whiting: I'm not real familiar with that area. What, how far?

Steven: It's like, ah

Mrs. Smith: Oh, it's not that far, really, it's about twenty.

Steven: I don't know, twenty miles
a trip.

Mrs. Smith: (To Mr. Smith) What's the
distance from (town), takes about

Mr. Smith: Forty miles round trip.

Steven: Ya.

Mrs. Smith: Twenty minute drive.

Steven: Back and forth.

Whiting: What's that sound like, what
John's saying to you before.

Steven: He was, like he was, you
see, in the way I am, I'm usually not
very confident in myself, and ah, he's
telling me about, ah, whatever field I
go into and if I apply myself I can be
good at it. And ah, he could be right.

Mr. Smith: I know I'm right.

Steven: But, ah

Mr. Smith: Because I wouldn't kid you
about a thing like that.

Steven: Um, I know. He was probably
the only person who, he showed, he gave
me a book that was of the job opportu-
nities and that was I don't really know
what other job opportunities are. I
haven't seen them. I took one and, you
know, tried to go into it, and I went into
it, but I had, you know, all these things
come up, and it just, I couldn't assert
myself into one area. You know, into
physical education because all these
things came up and, ah, right now even
if I went to a school right next to my
house that was good for P.E., I couldn't
do P.E. anymore.

Whiting: Uh huh.

The researcher realized
that the original re-
quest of having Steven
comment on his step-
father's comments had
been lost, so an attempt
was made to finish that
transaction.

Steven was again able
to switch the conver-
sation and the system's
rule about not comple-
ting transactions was
maintained.

Steven: I was, I was, I was going to switch my major. I still am but it's you know, um I, this school is not for me or I'm not for this school or however you want to put it, that's the way it is.

Whiting: It sounds like there are kind of a couple of issues involved as far as you going home. One would be school and career and what that all might look like.

Steven: Uh huh.

Whiting: Ah, and the other sounds like your girlfriend, that that's a concern, ah, it's

Mrs. Smith: It's a major factor, (Steven laughs) I would say the major thing.

Steven: Ah.

Mrs. Smith: But that is still going to be a problem // Steven.

Steven: It's you know

Mrs. Smith: Even the // you know, I'm sure Cheryl's parents breathed a great sigh of relief when you went off to school. You know, thank heavens he's gone. (laughs) Maybe he'll only be home once a month. (laughs)

Steven: I, they thought I was going home once a month and I came home, I was really feeling bad, when I went up to orientation week, it was bad up there, it was, I didn't care for anything in it, so I came back home. And ah, Mr. Albright, her father, went off the deep end because he was all happy and smiling, saying yo ho, this clown is gone, you know. And ah, he had, it's, she's the first dau, well first child in the family, it's her little girl I'm robbing the cradle and I'm

The researcher attempted to pull the interview together by identifying what seemed like the major concerns; Steven's girlfriend and his educational and vocational goals.

the bad boy and everything else, and, ah, he saw me back there that one weekend and he had a long talk with both of us and he said you two get done with your careers first. And about, you know, ah, in six or seven years then you can get married.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: You know it was like saying, you know, postpone feelings, and that's it cut it right there, caput, you go up there, she'll be down here, come home once a month, that's good, you know, people do that and ah. I, I really hate to be negative toward people and ah, you know, he, he pushed my buttons, he really, I didn't care for that. And ah, you know, whatever he dishes out now, you know, I have to respect because he's her father. But ah, I'll have a lot of problems. You know, I have to try to get back into college again cause that's the only way you can go nowadays. You know, I'm not saying mom I'm coming out of college and going in to work. I wouldn't exist. (Steven continued talking and described his summer job experience)

Again the reader can see the difficulty Steven and his mother had being direct with each other and complete transactions; evidence of enmeshment.

END

Whiting: You said that you kind of anticipated there would be some problems with Cheryl's family and

Mrs. Smith: Oh, I know there will be.

Whiting: (To Mrs. Smith) O.K. and what might that look like or be like I mean.

Steven: Oh, oh gees, I can see that now. He, Mr. Albright goes off the deep end, first of all, ah Mrs. Albright is, she's seen, she's gone through it with her husband because right now their

Once again the researcher attempted to get some direct answers from Mrs. Smith, and Steven was able to speak for her because the boundaries were diffuse.

marital status isn't very good either. If it wasn't for his major Catholic background, they probably would have divorced also. But ah, probably Mr. Albright's number one female in his life is not his wife, it is Cheryl. And there's, ah, competition there. And, ah, he gonna say you can't see him and this and that and everything else. It's just going to be the way it is.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: And I can live with it. I've already anticipated it. I can live with whatever he dishes out with. But ah, the one priority is me trying to get back into college.

Whiting: How about the idea of going to school and living at home?

Steven: I prefer that, um, after seeing, I don't know, maybe other dormitory life is better at other places. I, it's the first time I've experienced it and ah, I really am disenchanted with it. I didn't like it one bit.

Steven lived in the dormitory less than two weeks.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: Especially when they put an upperclassman in with me, you know, the freshmen, we're green, ah, sure people drink and do drugs and things like that, and ah, I'm not an alcoholic or anything else, but I've done my share of drinking, but you have to cut a fine line into it. I mean you're paying, whatever it is, well it's going to be a little over five thousand dollars to come here for you to try to screw up and go drinking and things like that. I couldn't see it. But if you're affecting me and my performance in my studies, I'm going to have a say about it. And they were affecting me

This was a good example of Steven's difficulty differentiating himself from his mother as they were both going to get the degree.

and my studies. And that's another factor, tied in with all the others, with Cheryl and the curriculum and this and that, that made me leave. Because, if myself and my mother are going to shell out good money, ah, we better get a degree. You know, plus I better learn something.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: But, you know, with all these factors tied in this school, didn't, can't meet the things that we expected it.

Again Steven demonstrated his difficulty differentiating himself from his mother.

END

The final two transcripts provided further interactional evidence of the limited range of transactional patterns members had with each other. Regardless of the content of the discussion, the family members demonstrated repeatedly their inability to complete transactions and their preference for a system which showed Mrs. Smith and Steven as allies on the same hierarchical level.

Whiting: I guess through it all, it sounds like it's been

Mrs. Smith: Never dull.

Whiting: O.K., never dull. All right, ah, where have folks looked for your own support in that I mean, friends, neighbors, ah, where do people go to, ah, you know, just kind of let it all hang out or feel supportive for things that you're doing?

Mrs. Smith: I don't even know how to go about answering that. (pause)
Really I don't. (anxious laugh)
(pause)

Whiting: Cause it's been more of a personal kind of ah, just kind of dealing with things on one's own and struggling along and getting along or

Mrs. Smith: Um, we do have someone that we see.

Steven: Oh, ya.

Mrs. Smith: Dr. Malley, and he's known the family for about ten years.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: He's a clinical psychologist.

Whiting: O.K.

Steven: I had, ah, my things with my father, I went to him, and he was good help because my father has a way of making you feel guilty for his mistakes, for his things which he has a talent for, and he makes you feel bad which my mother's gone through, which I've gone through, and my sister Linda has gone through.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Steven: And ah, you know, he's helped, he's probably, if there is an outside influence, it would be him.

END

Whiting: Quite frankly you sounded a little more angry than, than you are today.

Mrs. Smith: First of all you woke me up.

Whiting: Oh, I did.

Mrs. Smith: And I had only been asleep for about fifteen minutes.

Again we see the same pattern repeated. Mrs. Smith had been asked a direct question concerning the family, and Steven intervened as the family spokesperson. The similarity of experience was evidence of enmeshment.

The researcher had spoken with Mrs. Smith the previous day and she sounded upset with Steven's plans to drop out. An attempt was made to deal with this directly.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: And that's about all the sleep I had, O.K.?

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: After that, after your call, there was no more sleep.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: But ah, I was upset, there's no question about it.

Steven: (Smiles)

Mrs. Smith: Because if there was any obstacle about his coming up to Springfield, I didn't, I was never concerned about his acceptance whether or not that would be an issue, that never crossed my mind, he would be accepted.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: That's all there was to it. The major obstacle was the money. And both of us worked very hard to earn that money so Steven could come up here.

Whiting: Both of you, meaning you and Steven?

Mrs. Smith: Meaning Steven and I.

Whiting: Ya.

Mrs. Smith: And that made me a little bit angry.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: I mean I, he had a pretty good time at work. (laughs)

Steven: Ya, I learned a lot of

Mrs. Smith changed the conversation dramatically.

things.

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) Actually I enjoy my work, mostly.

Whiting: Good.

Steven: It's, it's, it was, it was

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) But when you're working double shifts two or three days in a row, it kind of knocks you for a loop.

Whiting: It sure does, it must.

Steven: Ya, it was a good experience, I got in at seven thirty, and she was about to leave, and I'd come up there and say hi mom, where's the patient, and she'd throw to me, and I'd bring them down to the O.R. (laughs)

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs)

Steven: It was fun.

Whiting: But I think, you know, I said as far as you seemed angrier, there is a cooling out at times, ah, the two of you had a chance to talk last night.

Mrs. Smith: Ah, I don't know whether I'd call it anger, I might call it more frustration.

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: I mean I've already lived through what he's going through, so has his stepfather, so has his father, so has his stepmother. I mean we have all been through it. Ah, if anything we are trying to spare him, not that it's going to do any good, it isn't. (Steven and his mother smiled and then laughed)

Whiting: O.K. Through it means, ah, we're not talking about dropping out of

This change of conversation showed the low tolerance for open conflict. The over-close relationship reappeared, the issue was sidetracked, and the system was maintained.

Enmeshment was demonstrated as Mrs. Smith suggested her life experiences were the same as Steven's. Mrs. Smith believed that she was in no position to influence her son, therefore supporting a skewed hierarchy.

school.

Mrs. Smith: No, I never, ah

Whiting: We're talking about
relationship.

Mrs. Smith: Ya, and early marriages,
and how your views change when you
mature a little more and this type
of thing.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: I don't think anyone has
ever questioned, ah, how deep his
feelings are for Cheryl. He's not
a, ah well, he's kind of a deep kid,
let me put it that way. I don't
think feeling would be any stronger
ten years from now. I don't think
his age really has anything to do
with it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: His feelings are very
strong for her, and none of us have
ever questioned that.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: Ah, it's, I know it's
difficult for them to cope with the
situation. They want to see each
other, they want to be with each other,
and they can't.

Whiting: Uh huh. And it sounds like
there is a lot of folks that can under-
stand that, ah, you know need to want
to be with someone, but also, ah

Mrs. Smith: I think her parents were,
ah, being, well, it's, it's difficult
for them to cope with it. There's
no question about it, their first
daughter, it's you know, it's going to
be hard for them, but they're, both of

them are very fine athletes, and they enjoy doing their thing together, and I really didn't see anything wrong with them swimming, and playing basketball, and jogging, and playing tennis, and you know, that was really kind of a great thing.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mrs. Smith: And it got to the point where they weren't even allowed to do that. I mean when you can only see someone once every two weeks, one night every two weeks, it kind of brings the concentration down to one thing (laughs) which I think was a mistake on their part. (pause) So I, it's going to be I think a rather unpleasant situation.

Steven: I can see that smiling face now. Mr. Albright warned me before when I left after a long discussion of us leaving and everything else and, he smiles through his, he could be smiling when in the back of his mind, he's saying, you know, you dirty you know.

Mrs. Smith: (Laughs) I don't really think she's thinking like that, Steven.

Steven: Uh, that's me I guess, that's the way I feel. (smiles)

Whiting: You think he's more frightened, that it's really possessive

Mrs. Smith: (Interrupting) I think that they are both very, very frightened.

Whiting: Are there some ways the transition can be smooth? In terms of, ah, I think one with Cheryl and you in terms, ah, looking at schools and living at home. Are there some ways even today to suggest

Steven: (Big sigh)

Although Mrs. Smith seemed opposed to the relationship Steven had with his girlfriend, Mrs. Smith's involvement with her son was such that she allied with him against Cheryl's parents.

The researcher made another attempt to deal with the issues at hand.

Whiting: how, how that can be?

Steven: You know it's, it could be smooth, you know, if I could get into (names university) or (names community college), one or the other. I would prefer (university) because of the baseball coach first of all and, ah, (community college) is not a graduate school or it does not give you a bachelor's degree and, ah

Mr. Smith: Do you really want to go to (university)?

Mr. Smith joined in with his style of helping.

Steven: Ya. If they have the right courses or something.

Mr. Smith: (To Steven) Do you have any objections if I talk to Joe Valle, an alumni?

Steven: No.

Mr. Smith: O.K.

Mrs. Smith: Talk to who?

Mr. Smith: Valle's an alumni, so is Guardione.

Mrs. Smith wanted to know what was going on because Mr. Smith's involvement with Steven was a threat to the system.

Mrs. Smith: Oh really?

Mr. Smith: Course. So is Gene Nattie. They must know somebody over there he could talk to, perhaps they could do something.

Steven: I have connections. (laughs) (mother smiles) And I ah, you know, how far is (university)? (to mother) Not that far, it goes (names town C, town D), no (town C, town E, town D).

Mr. Smith: You can't come to (names home town) for lunch for sure.

Steven: I know. (everyone laughs)
But ah, it's even with the gas crunch the

way it is, it wouldn't be that bad. You know I'd come at night, you know, do whatever I had to do, and do my studies and, ah, on the week-ends if I can work something out with her parents, take Cheryl out, you know, once a week or once every two weeks or whatever, but it could be smooth if they, Mr. and Mrs. Albright, don't go off the deep end, and say, oh you're back home, well I mean (sigh) I forbid you to see her forever.

Mrs. Smith: Going to be hanging around here again. (laughs)

Steven: Ya really, begging at my door like a wolf.

Mrs. Smith: I think if they would let up a little bit, Cheryl's a good student and she enjoys school.

Steven: Ya.

Mrs. Smith: I think if they would just let the pressure off a bit, the kids would be all right.

Steven: Here's another thing, that really, I'm getting off the track a little bit.

The system was maintained as Steven and his mother joked with each other.

Again issues were lost as Steven proceeded to get off the track.

END

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. For Steven, his girlfriend and coaches.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Steven's withdrawal from college supported the system's homeostasis because it prevented the family from changing. By Steven returning home, he could continue to be his mother's ally and helper as she was overextended working full time and going to school full time. Returning home enabled Steven to maintain his position in the parental subsystem and support the skewed hierarchical organization of the family.

The nature of the hierarchical organization of the family seemed to have impaired Mrs. Smith's ability to demonstrate effective parental control and influence over Steven. Although willing to assist Steven financially in college, she did not seem involved in his decision making concerning college and career selection. In this same regard, there was little problem solving or searching for alternatives to his decision to dropout of college. Mrs. Smith seemed to view Steven as competent and independent even though he reported that he did not feel very self confident.

At this time it appeared that living at home and commuting to either a neighboring university or going to a local community college would enhance the chances of maintaining the family homeostasis. The reader should remember that Steven had completed only his second week of classes when he withdrew from the college.

7. Capacity for restructuring. It was interesting to see that the initial structural assessment indicated that no restructuring moves were made. In retrospect, the researcher believed that this reflected

his sense of being somewhat overpowered by the system at the end of the interview. After the interview, the researcher felt rather confused and bewildered about what was actually happening in the family. After repeated viewings of the videotapes, the researcher was of the opinion that the family's transactional style of incompleteness and indirectness was the cause of the researcher's confusion after the interview.

The transcripts offered evidence that the researcher made several attempts to restructure the system. Because of the limited range of interactional patterns and the swiftness by which the system maintained itself after each restructuring attempt, it was felt that the family's capacity for restructuring was poor. The family's inability to complete transactions was characteristic of enmeshment.

This last section concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed by the research assistant. Also to be included will be final comments on the Johnson-Smith family.

Clearly all of the structural assessments supported each other. They were very consistent regarding the nature of the organization and the boundaries in the family. All of the assessments interpreted Steven's behavior as being overinvolved and overworked in the parental subsystem as he functioned as his mother's ally.

The assessments were also consistent regarding the current life context of the family as well as its developmental stage. They were similar in their analysis about the system's flexibility for

restructuring as none of them were very optimistic. The researcher's attempts to mark boundaries were swiftly overruled as the system repeatedly maintained itself.

All of the assessments conceptualized Steven's returning home as a homeostatic process which would aid in preventing the family from changing. The research assistant described Steven's returning home as providing a "marriage" with his mother. This analysis clearly was responding to the intensity of the mother-son alliance. Steven's loyalty to the family, which was evidenced by his tendency to be the family authority and informational data bank concerning his mother, brothers and sisters, appeared to have impaired his ability to be autonomous. It was speculated that Steven's resolution of living at home and attending college appeared to only rigidify the family's limited style of interaction.

Throughout the interview, Mrs. Smith and Steven demonstrated the enmeshed quality of their relationship. The style of interpersonal transactions which repeatedly showed itself during the interview was that of Steven being overinvolved in the parental subsystem with his mother. Not only was this diffuse boundary evidence of enmeshment, but other enmeshed behavior was demonstrated by the manner in which Steven and his mother interrupted each other, shared each other's stresses and life experiences, and showed little tolerance for open conflict with each other.

A pattern which did not appear was that of Steven functioning in the role of conflict defuser between his parents. In this particular

interview, the family showed little tolerance for conflict and seemed to keep levels of stress lowered by not completing transactions, by changing the topic of conversation, and by indirectness.

In conclusion, the Johnson-Smith family appeared limited in their ability to change at a time when change was indicated. Steven's leaving home to attend college could have been an opportunity for the family to develop new interactional rules. In some ways, Steven's dropping out of college appeared as an appropriate metaphor for the family since nothing seemed to get fully completed. Dyadic communication between members was very incomplete and marriages though seemingly finished by divorce and separation appeared to be ongoing with children moving back and forth and respective spouses marrying each other. Since the family had difficulty bringing closure to issues and events, perhaps it follows that Steven did not complete his educational plans.

Section II - Adams Family

Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On October 11, 1979, the secretary in the Dean of Students' Office called to report that Sally Adams was leaving college immediately. An interview was scheduled that morning. During the interview, the research project was explained to Sally and she agreed to participate. Having already talked to her parents about her decision to leave, she reported that her mother had probably already left home as Mrs. Adams was driving to Sally's Aunt Joan and Uncle Leo's house. Uncle Leo was on vacation and he and Aunt Joan were planning to accompany Sally's mother on the 10-hour trip to Springfield. After receiving no answer at Sally's home, the researcher called her aunt and uncle's home and spoke with Uncle Leo. This writer briefly explained the purpose of the call and asked if he would have Sally's mother call this researcher when she arrived at their home. Mrs. Adams called, the project was explained, and an interview which included Mrs. Adams, Sally, Aunt Joan and Uncle Leo was held the following day.

2. Description of the family. The Adams family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Adams and their four children: Sally age 18, two sons ages 16 and 14, and a daughter age 12. Mrs. Adams had a high school education and was a housewife. Mr. Adams also graduated from high school and worked a delivery route for a milk company. He could not attend the interview as he could not get off from work.

suggested that the family had some difficulty concerning autonomy. The Adams family was described by everyone present at the interview as being "very close". Both Sally and her mother anticipated that her being 10 hours away from home was going to be a major transition for Sally. This researcher believed that no one in the family, including Aunt Joan or Uncle Leo, was either surprised or concerned that Sally was leaving college to return home. The message the family gave to this writer was that Sally tried the difficult task of being away from home, discovered to no one's surprise she could not handle it, and now she was returning home to live forever like the rest of the family.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. The primary and probably sole source of support seemed to come from within the nuclear family as well as from Mrs. Adams' extended family. There was a notion of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, coupled with a fear of the outside world. The family members appeared to look to each other and not to outsiders which, realistically, was a limited source of support.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. Although Mrs. Adams denied any difficulties within the past year, it was difficult to get a true picture of what was going on in this rigidly closed family system. The message was clear that if anything was troublesome in the family, this researcher was not going to hear about it.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Clearly Sally's re-turning home kept the family close and together. To differentiate from the family seemed to be a violation of nuclear and extended family

rules. The diffuse family boundaries inhibited differentiation and supported overinvolvement. This researcher experienced the family as being delighted to have Sally return home. Her sister, upon hearing that Sally was returning home, immediately, without any parental encouragement, rearranged their shared bedroom and drawer space to the way they were before Sally left for college.

Any hint by this researcher that Sally's returning home may be problematic was quickly disqualified by joking remarks and denial. In fact, she was congratulated for staying four weeks as the researcher was informed that very few students, and none of Sally's friends who graduated from the local high school, had been able to remain away at college for very long. In talking about the many students that dropped out of college to return home, there was a tone to the conversation which suggested approval of this phenomenon.

To conclude, it appeared that being 10 hours away from home was a violation of both a nuclear and extended family rule about differentiation. Returning home supported the family homeostasis as no change could happen with Sally home.

7. Capacity for restructuring. The family was experienced by this writer as being very rigid and very closed to the outside world. Their capacity for restructuring appeared very low as their reality of Sally's dropping out was one of no conflict or problem because "everything was just fine".

Section II - Adams Family

Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

2. Description of the family. Sally's family was a very close family that hailed from (named town). Sally's mother was one of 15 sibs (13 are still living) and all of her sibs lived in the same community. Sally (a quiet young woman around 18 - a recreation major at Springfield College in her first semester) was the oldest of four sibs. She had two brothers, 16 and 14 years of age, and a sister who was 12. Her parents had been married for 20 years. Both Mr. and Mrs. Adams graduated from high school. Sally's mother (about 40) had never worked outside of the home and Sally's father was a milk truck driver.

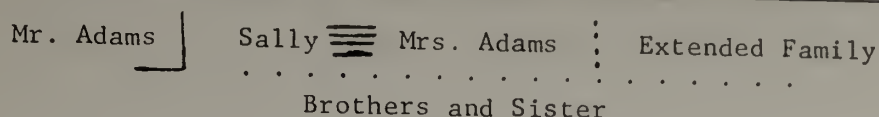
Three people came down to pick up Sally: her mother, her mother's youngest sister and her sister's husband. Sally's aunt was very quiet during most of the session. When she did talk, it was with a voice in a very low register. Sally's uncle was jovial and seemed to want to help out the researcher and say the right thing.

The family spent some time discussing how few people leave (named town), that most of the girls that went away to school were back now, and how it might be easier for boys to leave from there. They proudly mentioned how the family now had 55 grandchildren.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Aunt Joan, Uncle Leo : Mrs. Adams ≡ Sally

3b. Hypothesized map of Adams family based on interview data.



In this family, there seemed to be a lot of rules about staying close to home. At no point in the interview did people ask Sally specific individual questions about what was hard for her being away at Springfield College, or what might have helped her to stay, or what would need to change for her to stay. There were no statements of personal choice or preference, everyone just accepted that it would be better for her at home.

With Sally being the oldest child, she seemed to be particularly overinvolved with her mother. Women seemed to be close in this family and there may be some family rules about female ties.

The evidence for the overinvolvement of Sally and her mother was suggested by:

- A. In the first two or three minutes of the session when a question was addressed to Sally, her mother spoke for her. This happened six or seven times during the $\frac{1}{2}$ hour tape.
- B. Sally and her mother sat next to each other throughout the session in a twosome (with their chairs facing the other three people in the room). Their body posture was similar, legs spread apart a little, hands in their lap or on their legs.
- C. Mother looked at Sally frequently throughout the session.
- D. Mother showed no surprise that Sally was lonely and wanted to move back home. It was almost as if she was expecting it,

that it was only a matter of time.

- E. Mother had plans for Sally's future which she described; that Sally could go to school at home, that Sally had already been accepted into school there, etc. Sally did not stop her mother from speaking for herself or say that she had different plans, but went along with what her mother said.

The evidence for the overinvolvement of Sally's mother and her extended family was suggested by:

- A. Close physical proximity. All living in the same area.
- B. The fact that the mother's sister and brother-in-law came with her to pick Sally up.
- C. The statement from several family members that they were a close family. Sally's aunt wasn't surprised that Sally was coming home, "because we are a close family".
- D. There was no mention or discussion of Sally's father except when the researcher asked about his work and level of education.
- E. Everyone was in agreement regarding the reason Sally was coming back home. No one had a different idea.

4. Family's developmental stage. The family was in the middle marriage stage of development. Sally was the first child to leave home and as such, her difficulty in leaving reflected how hard it was for this family to move into the developmental stage of letting their teenagers become independent. With the youngest child being 12 and the oldest one 18, shortly all of their children would be in the teenage

years and the parental role would shift. It was believed that in this family the shift to more autonomy and responsibility for the children had not yet been made. In the family discussion about Sally moving back home, the research assistant had little sense of their support for a commitment that Sally had made to attend college or the responsibilities that Sally had for her new life.

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

- A. Large extended family.
- B. The family knew the area and resources of their hometown very well.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

- A. Sally being away.
- B. The researcher asked the family directly if there had been any particular family stresses in the last year and they answered by talking about Sally moving back home and sidestepped the question completely. The research assistant's guess was that there were other significant areas of stress in this family that they didn't share with the researcher.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? The research assistant conjectured that in this family, the close alliance between mother and Sally and mother and her family of origin provided a buffer for the rigid boundary between the parents. With Sally leaving the family, the homeostasis was probably stirred up enough so that on some level the parents were faced with the issue of after the kids leave, what next?

This was probably too threatening to the homeostasis and so the family quickly reorganized around having Sally come back. Immediately, her sister moved her things back to her half of the room so that Sally could have her space again. Sally's return home also reinforced a family rule about the outside world. Throughout the interview, all four family members sat with their coats on as if they were ready to leave.

7. Capacity for restructuring. It was speculated that the family's flexibility and capacity for restructuring was very low because throughout the interview they were very subdued, almost depressed, not very trusting of the outside world and they communicated very indirectly. For example, when the researcher asked Sally what it would be like when she moved back home, Sally responded with the statement, "I'll get a job".

Jokes told by the brother-in-law were the main way that this family tried to liven up.

Section II - Adams Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to the researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family. The family had a very limited range of transactional styles as no other patterns emerged during the interview. The researcher was shown repeatedly throughout the interview the following pattern represented by this structural map.

Mrs. Adams	⋮	Aunt Joan, Uncle Leo
.	⋮
Sally		

This map indicated the diffuse boundaries which existed throughout the family with Sally and her mother overinvolved with each other.

The three following transcripts served as evidence of this configuration.*

Whiting: Tell me some about the decision to come here. How that was made, coming to Springfield College, kind of what went into that, how you were involved in that as a parent.

*The researcher was unaware that the audio mechanism on the videotape deck was malfunctioning during the interview. Consequently the audio portion of the tape was of a very poor quality. After a great deal of time was spent listening and watching the interview, this writer was confident that the transcript was accurate. Where it was impossible to discern what members were saying exactly, it was marked inaudible.

Sally: Well, I wanted to come here because I knew I could get the best education at this school, you know, for my major, so I decided to come.

Whiting: That was P.E.?

Sally: No, recreation.

Whiting: Did you folks come down?

Mother: Yes, we did. In April, April

Whiting: And you left excited or

Sally: Ya, I was really impressed with the place, I really was.

Whiting: Does this come as a surprise at this point.

Mother: No, because I, she called, you know, she called home, and I knew she was lonesome, but I waited for her, you know, I didn't tell her to come, you know. What, if she wanted to come home, she'd let us know. She called home and wanted to come home.

Whiting: Joan, you seemed to nod like, ah

A. Joan: (Everybody laughs) I'm just agreeing with what everybody's saying.

Whiting: Were you surprised or what?

A. Joan: No, not really, they're a close family, you know.

Mother: And like her doing, she knows she could go to (names college near home) for recreation too so, probably

U. Leo: What's there been four or five girls we've seen leave (names county) lately, and they've all been back, you know, she's lasted longer than anyone else. (everybody laughs)

Sally answered the question which was directed to Mrs. Adams. This suggested diffuse boundaries between the subsystems.

The diffuse boundaries were again demonstrated as Mrs. Adams spoke for Sally. The researcher got the first clue about the family's possible limited problem solving capacity as they did not explore any alternatives other than Sally leaving college.

Enmeshment was suggested as everyone seemed to have the same perceptions.

Mother announced what Sally's plans were and the nature of their relationship was beginning to appear as enmeshed.

Whiting: Kids in your class and

U. Leo: Oh, well ya.

Sally: Ya.

U. Leo: Well ya, the girl at the bank
went what? How many days?

A. Joan: One day. She went down, you
know, Labor Day and didn't even go to
class and came back home. (laughs)

U. Leo: Sandy, Sandy, from (names
hometown) and what Pat, last year?

A. Joan: She, she

U. Leo: She lasted a week, didn't she?

Mother: No, just a couple of days.

U. Leo: A couple of days at (names
college) in (names town) and came
home.

A. Joan: Home bodies, I guess. (laughs)

Whiting: Was it something that people
talked about like, you know, look like,
ah, being far away from home or that's
going to be kind of a hard move. How
did, was that brought up, was that
talked about?

Mother: Well, I was glad for her, she
wanted to come here, and I let her
make her own decision where she wanted
to go to college. I thought it was a
long way but,

U. Leo: I encouraged her a little bit
after she talked about Springfield, I
encouraged her to go there. I had
heard a lot about it. It has a good
reputation especially with coaches and
in athletic field, it's one of the best
in the country, isn't it? (addressed
to Whiting)

The diffuse boundaries
enabled Uncle Leo to
answer for Sally.

The message this re-
searcher was hearing
from Mrs. Adams, Aunt
Joan and Uncle Leo was
do not be critical of
Sally's leaving college.
There was absolutely no
problem with what she
was doing, in fact she
should be congratulated
for staying as long as
she did.

This interaction gave
evidence of the diffi-
culty members had deal-
ing directly with issues.
The question never got
answered and Uncle Leo
attempted to shift the
conversation.

END

Whiting: Are you surprised Sally a little bit in terms of kind of coming down here in April and the excitement of looking forward to being, being accepted, and at this point see yourself go home, is that

Sally: Well, I thought I would probably last longer than this, but I can't.

Whiting: You thought, you thought it would be hard to do?

Sally: I knew it would be a big adjustment coming here. I didn't think it would be this big.

Whiting: Was it kind of right away that

Mother: She called Sunday night and said she had wanted to come home and transfer to (names school near home).

Whiting: O.K., this past Sunday?

Mother: Ya, then she called back an, last, ah, yesterday night, crying, she, you know, she was lonesome.

Whiting: Sure.

Mother: She knew she could come home this weekend, he happened to be home, so we'll go, he's on vacation this week, so we'll go down and get her home.

Whiting: How about before that, like the first few weeks, was there

Mother: No, she never said anything about coming home. Sunday was the first time. She'd mentioned maybe transferring. But it didn't really come as a surprise. I knew she was lonesome. (pause) I figured if she was lonesome she wouldn't be learning anything anyway.

Mrs. Adams answered for Sally and further demonstrated her overinvolvement as she spoke about Sally's plans and feelings.

The system responded quickly to bring Sally home. Bringing her home appeared to be the only solution.

Whiting: Right.

Mother: She couldn't concentrate on what she was doing.

Whiting: Sure. Have there been any other kinds of, I guess, my assumption is, is that this is kind of a stressful time, ah, for a student to move away from home and be excited about going away to school, and now to be coming home. There is some stress that every one feels around that. Within the last year have there been any other, say stressful things in the family, loss of job, death in the family.

Mother: Oh, no. (long pause) I just think that really the thing is like every, all her friends, where they go to school, they come home a lot of times on weekends, and she couldn't. You know it's quite a ways for her when she knows say once a month at least they probably go home, or they have other friends at the same school where she doesn't.

Whiting: Really, you are on your own.
(spoken to Sally)

Mother: Ya. (Sally nods)

U. Leo: (Inaudible)

Whiting: So, it seems like everyone is pretty much in agreement about the reason why Sally might be going, in a sense it is too far away.

Sally: Ya, it's really too far.

END

Whiting: It sounds like there's some element of surprise that this is happening, it sounds like people went into it with the idea that this was far away from home, but this might

Mrs. Adams denied any other concerns and gave her expert opinion on the cause of her daughter's lonesomeness.

Mother spoke for Sally again, further inter-actional evidence supporting an enmeshed overinvolved relationship.

An attempt was made to escalate stress in the family by saying that there was some surprise that Sally was leaving.

happen, I'm not sure?

Mother: Well I didn't think it would happen so quick. I don't, I thought probably she'd go the year, and, you know, from there she'd decide, come back, but you see she was lonesome, and she called a few times a week, but like I say, I left it up to her, I didn't encourage her, say anything about coming home, I didn't, you know. If she was lonesome, she wouldn't do her work.

Whiting: You were worried.

Mother: We were, then.

Whiting: Ya.

U. Leo: Well like I said (inaudible) very close knit family, friends, everyone knows everyone else's business. It's really a small town.

Whiting: How many people in the town?

U. Leo: I'm saying the whole area, the Adams come from (names town) and you know, from town to town what's going on, very (geographically names part of country) very local.

It appeared that Mrs. Adams assumed Sally would not adjust to being away. It was interesting to see how Mrs. Adams denied her own influence in Sally's decision to return home, yet she acknowledged that she wasn't surprised that she was coming home.

Uncle Leo described the enmeshed quality within the family as well as within the hometown community.

END

The three preceding excerpts were representative of the family's enmeshed style of interacting as members intruded and spoke for each other. Mrs. Adams was also the spokesperson concerning her daughter's sadness and how that impaired her studies. These excerpts also demonstrated the system's reaction to Sally's plans about coming home and their style of defusing stress through humor. The message seemed, "Do not be critical, look how well she did".

Although Mrs. Adams would deny she suggested that Sally return home, her encouraging response was certainly swift when Sally expressed a desire to return home. Seemingly, there were no attempts to explore other possibilities or alternatives to this decision.

In the next two excerpts, this writer was purposely trying to open up this closed system. In the first example, this writer wanted to see the system's response to information that Uncle Leo had shared in the phone conversation with the researcher. And in the second excerpt, this writer wanted some information about Sally's transition back into the family.

Whiting: You said you felt a little disappointed that Sally's leaving.

U. Leo: I said it's too bad she's leaving school and, I also said what? If she's not happy, she's better off being home.

Mother: It's not like she's gonna quit college altogether is she. She's going to (names school).

U. Leo: When you are in the service they have a dishonorable discharge over your head so you couldn't go home, but that's something though entirely different.

Whiting: (Laughs) Certainly, certainly a lot of people wanted to go.

U. Leo: (Laughs) I know the feelings, a lot of times I wanted to go home, you know.

Whiting: Sure. I'm glad we didn't hold dishonorable discharges over people's heads. (everybody laughs)

Uncle Leo moved swiftly to take the pressure off by minimizing what he said, and he let everyone know he also thought Sally should return home.

Mother responded to protect her daughter; evidence of enmeshment.

Uncle Leo supported Sally's decision to return home.

The researcher attempted to join more with the family's reality of the situation.

U. Leo: Right, I know that was a poor example.

Whiting: No, I think it was a good example, but it's

U. Leo: No, I remember a lot of times, forget this, I'm going home, in them days you couldn't do that.

Mother: Well like her now, she

U. Leo: // You should have

Whiting: Or you're in trouble.

U. Leo: Right. //

Mother: She'd be better off starting this next term wouldn't she at (names school)?

Whiting: Up there.

Mother: Ya.

Whiting: Well, are they on a semester system?

Mother & Sally: Ya, there are just two semesters.

Whiting: Probably the easiest thing to do would, you know, be to see what their application procedures are like for transfer students and

Mother: She was already accepted there, you know. She was accepted there, and she heard she was accepted there too, so she knows she is accepted.

Whiting: O.K. It seems like school's important to you, and you and you liked the curriculum here. Do they have recreation there?

Sally: Ya, ya, and physical education also.

The strength of the system was clearly demonstrated here and the researcher intentionally answered Mrs. Adams' questions. The researcher believed that there was no way he was going to be let into the system by challenging it, therefore, a decision was made to accommodate to it for a while.

Whiting: It would seem to make sense to get started up when you get home as soon as you could and get going.

END

Whiting: Will there be, you know, I know that when I went away to school as soon as I left, my bedroom was turned into a sewing room. (everybody laughs)

Mother: No, no, her sis

U. Leo: (Interrupting) That's funny, we were talking about this on the way down. Her younger sister has already moved back to her half and had it all ready for her to move back in. We said it on the way down, that's why I'm laughing.

Because of the enmeshed style of interacting, Uncle Leo was able to interrupt and describe what was happening in the Adams family.

Whiting: All right.

U. Leo: Half her drawers are already cleaned out and everything.

Mother: Half the drawers (inaudible).

Whiting: She did that all on her own, sometimes that new space can be hard to give up.

Sally's returning home clearly helped the system to remain stable.

Mother: No she's, she's missed her too, she's 12.

Mrs. Adams minimized any possible difficulties regarding Sally's returning home.

U. Leo: There's a big (inaudible) chair from Charles, have you seen it?

Sally: No.

U. Leo: That might have to go if you don't like that. (everyone laughs)

Whiting: So the kind of idea of, kind of reintergrating back in, is

Mother: No, they're all anxious to have her back home.

The family was eagerly awaiting Sally's return home.

END

Again the message was loud and clear that the Adams family was very happy to have their daughter home and that any hint that Sally's leaving college was problematic was disqualified through laughter and changes in the conversation.

In the following section, the researcher wanted some sense of how encompassing the enmeshed quality was in the extended families. Here again the response suggested a very close and closed group of people. It also further expanded the rule about non differentiation. Members of these families, especially women, were not to leave the area.

Whiting: Have other people, say of Sally's generation, Sally's age, ah, left, or have people pretty much stayed in (hometown)?

A. Joan: A few ya, nephews, one in (Midwest State), one in (Southern State), (pause)

Mother: Most of them did go to college in (hometown).

A. Joan: Ya (inaudible).

Whiting: It's probably hard in (Midwest) and (South).

A. Joan: Well one's in the service and the other just in (Midwest). He just moved out there, he likes it. (pause) Well these are boys, I don't know if that makes a difference.

Whiting: O.K.

Staying home was a theme which ran through these families, though the conversation suggested some differences between men and women and the appropriateness of leaving home.

Mother: I think boys do have an easier time, don't they? (spoken to Whiting)

Mrs. Adams attempted to shift the focus back to the researcher.

END

The following sequence at the end of the interview was just another example of the same enmeshed theme which has been mentioned repeatedly in discussing this family.

Whiting: You know, it seems like, ah, the decision's been made and Sally called home and let you know that.

Mother: Ah, it was her decision alone, I know she was lonesome, and I let her make her own decision.

Whiting: And it doesn't sound like you had threats of a dishonorable discharge or (everyone laughs)

Mother: (Laughs) No, no.

U. Leo: (Inaudible)

Whiting: No, no, it wasn't that. It was like, you know, we'll listen to Sally and hear what she's saying, and if you would like to come home, she's certainly welcome to come home, and kind of go from there.

U. Leo: It's just that this way she might have to sleep outside for a couple of weeks now, no, no, I'm only kidding. (everyone laughs)

Mother: No, cause I heard of people, and some went away to college, and they have called home, and they wouldn't let them come home.

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: And they do different things,

Again Mrs. Adams denied her influence in the decision while using paradoxical language. One cannot make an independent decision if someone else is letting you make the decision.

to me that's wrong. She wanted to come home, she can come home.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Good or for bad, she wouldn't be any further ahead really.

Mrs. Adams demonstrated again the family's limited range of problem solving and low tolerance for conflict.

END

The data from the interview offered this hypothesized structural assessment which included other family members.

Mr. Adams]	Mrs. Adams	:	Extended Family
			
		Sally, Brothers and Sister		

Mrs. Adams and Sally's relationship was shown as being enmeshed and overinvolved. It was speculated that diffuse boundaries existed within the sibling subsystem and between Mrs. Adams and the other children. This enmeshed quality was also indicated between Mrs. Adams and other extended family members. Because Mr. Adams was never mentioned by Mrs. Adams or Sally, a rigid boundary was drawn.

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Sally's returning home aided the system in not changing. It appeared that being away from home jeopardized the overclose relationship between Mrs. Adams and Sally. It

was interesting to hear how Mrs. Adams denied her influence in having Sally return home. However she commented several times that she knew Sally was lonesome and couldn't do her work, that she expected her home sooner or later and was only surprised that Sally was returning home so soon. The enmeshed quality of the nuclear and extended families seemed to have impaired Sally's development of a sense of autonomy and competence away from the family. The enmeshed transactional style could be continued with Sally's dropping out of college.

7. Capacity for restructuring. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

This last section concluded with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed by the research assistant. Also included were final comments on the Adams family.

There was almost complete agreement between the structural assessments done by this researcher and the one done by the research assistant. The observations concerning the enmeshed quality of the family and the resulting difficulties members had being autonomous and differentiated were clearly supported in both analyses. The nature of the relationship between Mrs. Adams and Sally was seen as being over-involved as a result of the diffuse boundaries between these two members. The only difference in the structural maps concerned the placement of Sally in the family's hierarchy. The research assistant placed Sally in the parental subsystem, whereas this researcher placed her in the sibling subsystem. This researcher was of the opinion that

it was more accurate to place Sally in the sibling subsystem because there was no interactional evidence which showed Sally being inappropriately involved in her mother's affairs. Interactionally it appeared that Mrs. Adams was overinvolved with her daughter's life plans, decisions, and emotions but not vice versa.

Both assessments also concurred that the family was having difficulty negotiating new rules appropriate for the middle marriage stage of development. At a time when change was necessary, Sally's returning home only appeared to further rigidify the family rules against autonomous, differentiated behavior.

Both assessments reflected consistent perceptions about the closed quality of this very close family. The researcher represented an outsider and the interviewed family members worked hard to keep the researcher out. As a result, both assessments conjectured that there were possibly other stressful issues in the family, but they were not verbalized.

The assessments also hypothesized that there was a rigid boundary between Mr. and Mrs. Adams and between Mr. Adams and the children. If the researcher had not asked specific questions about Mr. Adams' education and employment, he would never have been mentioned. Both assessments highlighted the enmeshed quality which extended through Mrs. Adams' side of the family.

In summary, the structural assessments clearly supported each other. The family was perceived as a rigidly closed system, with little capacity for restructuring, which responded swiftly to have the

oldest child return home because being away at college challenged the family rules against autonomy and independence. At a developmental stage when change was appropriate in terms of Sally having increased responsibility and autonomy, her returning home helped solidify the rules against differentiation.

Clearly the family experienced Sally's returning home as non problematic or concerning. This writer speculated that the family's reality of this phenomenon was that Sally tried hard to leave home for college but because she was so lonesome, she found it impossible to continue her education. As a result, returning home was the only possible solution. The researcher speculated that Sally's traumatic experience at college will be mentioned anytime any other children, especially women, within either the nuclear family or extended families attempt to leave home and the area.

In conclusion the Adams family represented a very rigidly closed system which was difficult for the researcher to join. Though members worked hard to keep the researcher out, they unquestionably presented evidence of how the family interacted. These interactions demonstrated a very limited range of transactional patterns. The transactional evidence offered in the transcripts clearly demonstrated the diffuseness of the boundaries in the enmeshed nuclear and extended family.

During the interview, there was no interactional evidence suggesting that Sally's role was one of conflict defuser in her family. The manner in which the family responded to Sally's returning home suggested that denial was the central defense against conflict. Clearly

Sally's leaving college was seen as non problematic. Because the researcher felt the strength of the system's rules against differentiation, it was speculated that Sally would live at home and perhaps attend the university branch in her hometown. It was further speculated that she would never venture off again.

Section III - Rush Family

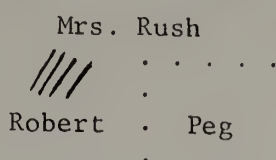
Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On October 23, 1979, at 3:45 P.M., the secretary in the Dean of Students' Office called and reported that Robert Rush and his mother were with the Dean and that Robert was withdrawing from the college that afternoon. The secretary asked Mrs. Rush and Robert if they would meet with this researcher at 5:30 that evening. They agreed without speaking directly to this writer. At 5:30 P.M., this researcher met Robert and asked him to get his mother as she would also be involved in the interview. They returned and Mrs. Rush said that her daughter Peg was in the car. Robert was asked to get his sister as it would be helpful if she also attended the interview. When three members of the family were present, this researcher explained the purpose of the interview. Because of some confusion about who had the keys to the observation room where the videotape equipment was, the interview did not begin until 6:00 P.M. Mrs. Rush was just ready to leave as she had waited two hours, when the person with the keys arrived. After this rather troublesome beginning, an interview, which lasted approximately an hour and a half, was completed.

2. Description of the family. The family consisted of Mrs. Rush and her three children: Sheila age 23, Robert, the dropout student, age 18, and Peg, a junior high school student, age 14. Mr. and Mrs. Rush were divorced eleven years ago and maintain some contact, usually

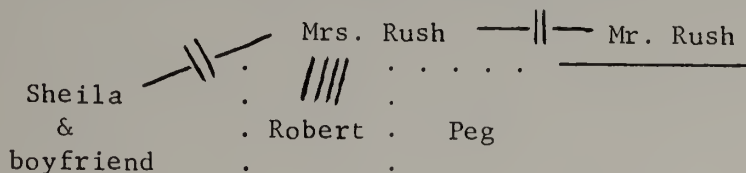
centering around the children. Mrs. Rush was employed for several years as a beautician. Since September 1979, Sheila had been living with her boyfriend in the same community where the family resided, which was approximately 50 miles away from Springfield College.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.



This map represented an enmeshed family with diffuse boundaries within the sibling subsystem as well as between the sibling subsystem and the parental subsystem. It also indicated an intense, overinvolved relationship between Robert and his mother.

3b. Hypothesized map of Rush family based on interview data.



From information gained in the interview, a hypothesized map indicated conflicted boundaries between Mr. and Mrs. Rush, and between Mrs. Rush and her oldest daughter. Where the boundary between Mrs. Rush and her children was enmeshed, the boundary between Mr. Rush and the children was disengaged.

4. Family's developmental stage. Developmentally, there were several issues in the family because of the combination of two stages: the courtship and middle marriage. Regarding the courtship stage, Mrs. Rush reported that the previous week, she and a man whom she has been

involved with for a year and a half were planning to be married in two months. She was planning to sell her home and move to a neighboring state. Because Peg did not want to disrupt her education in the middle of the year, she planned to remain at home. Whom she was going to live with was unresolved. Mrs. Rush suggested she could live with Mrs. Rush's sister or possibly with Peg's father. Peg and her father had not lived together for 11 years and had not discussed these possible plans.

The family was, in a sense, also at the middle marriage stage of development as adolescents were being launched. Clearly there has been some conflict in this developmental process. Just as Robert was leaving home to go to college, his sister, Sheila, left home to live with her boyfriend. Data from the interview strongly suggested some conflict between Mrs. Rush and her daughter's choice of a boyfriend.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. It appeared that there were very few outside sources of support. The family tended to rely on itself with Robert functioning as mother's ally. It was reported by Robert that other extended family members relied on Mrs. Rush for support, but that she personally kept things to herself. Mrs. Rush agreed with his assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. It was very evident that there was stress around all of the previously mentioned developmental issues. Additional stress was apparent with Robert's plans to move in with his sister, Sheila. This was against his mother's wishes. She wanted him to move to the new home after she

married.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Interactionally a strong stable alliance between Robert and his mother was demonstrated. The boundaries within the family system of the interviewed members were diffuse, most noticeably between Robert and Mrs. Rush who were overinvolved with each other. Without question, Mrs. Rush was an expert on Robert and Peg, as she spoke for them, indicated that she could read their minds, was upset when they were upset, and intruded into much of their conversation. The enmeshed quality of the system appeared to have significantly impaired the autonomy among members of this family.

From the interview, this writer speculated that Robert was leaving college to go home to take care of the family members, especially Peg, who was upset about her mother's marital plans and the possibility of her moving in with her father. Robert had heard from his girlfriend that Peg was upset and he called Peg on a few occasions to see how she was coping.

Lastly, Robert's leaving college and going home verified Mrs. Rush's image of him as being a good average boy, but insecure and relying on her and home too much.

7. Capacity for restructuring. It was felt that changing this family would be difficult for several reasons. First they were not very motivated to change. The idea of seeing a family therapist was offered by this researcher on two occasions and on each occasion, the conversation quickly shifted to other issues. Secondly, the style of

communication was one of incomplete transactions. Business did not get completed in this family organization. The interviewer's attempts to reach closure on an issue between two members proved to be frustrating for family members and a third person usually joined in to lower the stress. Lastly, the intensity by which members rigidly clung to interactional patterns characteristic of enmeshment would be difficult to change.

Section III - Rush Family

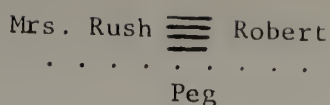
Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

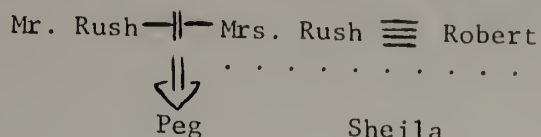
2. Description of the family. Robert's family consisted of Robert (18), his younger sister, Peg (14), an older sister (23), who lived in an apartment with her boyfriend, his mother, a hairdresser (age 44), and Robert's father who lived in another house in their home town. Robert's mother and father divorced 11 years ago. During the last 11 years, Robert reported that his mother had worked very hard at providing a good home life for the family. Robert still saw his father from time to time, but he had not talked with him about his decision to leave school, nor had he talked with him much about his original decision to come to Springfield College. Three people came to the session: mother, Robert, and Peg. In the session, it came out that Robert's mother had announced plans within the last week to marry, and that she was planning to move to her fiancée's home in another state in two months. She wanted Robert to move with her, but Robert wanted to stay home near his girlfriend, Susan. Peg was probably going to live with her father.

Mrs. Rush was very dynamic and directed most of the interview. Peg's emotions were seemingly close to the surface, and three or four times during the session, she cried.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.



3b. Hypothesized map of Rush family based on interview data.



Evidence of the overinvolvement of Robert and mother.

- A. Robert was designated as the only child who understood mom (and certainly the father didn't understand mom).
- B. In the session when the researcher tried to make contact with Peg, most of the time the family brought the focus right back to mom and Robert.
- C. Robert allowed mom to speak for him frequently throughout the session, allowed her to describe how he should be a bartender, should not see his girlfriend, Susan, so much, should not live with his older sister because she would smother him, etc.
- D. Mother stated how she got nervous when Robert was nervous.

Evidence for including father as an important figure in the family even though parents have been divorced for 11 years.

- A. Mother and father continued to exchange a lot of angry words.
- B. He was brought up by all members of the family during the session.
- C. The last big fight that mother and father had was about Peg and for clothes for Peg.

4. Family's developmental stage. The family was in the courtship

and middle marriage stages of development. It seemed that this family was headed for a clash with two developmental stages happening at the same time. The teenagers did not have permission to begin to explore life according to their newly forming rules, rather they had to live up to stern family shoulds (rigid family rules). Above all, they could not be loyal to mother and father both; they had to be loyal to mother first. Mom was in the courtship phase at the same time as her children are starting to enter it, and it was the prediction of the research assistant that there will be confusion with the two generations entering the courtship phase at the same time.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. Different individuals in this family seemed to have a particular person they got support from, but the research assistant did not get a strong sense of outside contacts/support for the whole family. The family itself seemed isolated.

- A. Robert, support from Susan.
- B. Mother, support from fiancée.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

- A. Income - money to live on.
- B. Continued tension in the parental dyad.
- C. Older sister not marrying, living with her boyfriend.
- D. Mother's new boyfriend.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Robert's moving back home supported the family's preferred pattern of interaction with his

role being that of the good kid, the one who understood mom. He was being the most loyal to the family rule, "Don't criticize mom because she's done all she could to raise us alone for the last 11 years".

7. Capacity for restructuring. Fair. On the surface the family seemed fairly verbal with some insight into their problems. However, the pattern of the mother directing the family was very intense and may be difficult to break. By necessity, she had to be very central to hold the family together for many years, however that centrality needed to shift to a different type as the children grew older.

Section III - Rush Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family. Unequivocally, the dominant transactional structure of this family appeared as:

Mrs. Rush
 ///
 Robert . Peg
 .

This map illustrated the enmeshed quality of the family with its diffuse boundaries. It also indicated the overinvolved nature of the relationship between Robert and his mother.

The five following transcripts served as evidence of this configuration.

Whiting: Do you have any sense of how that (the decision) was made to come to Springfield?

Mother: I have no conception. He, he, ah,

Robert: I was undecided on what I wanted to do, and I always liked athletics, so

Mother: (Interrupting) But your first thought, your first thought Robert was, what?

Robert: What, out of high school?

Mother: When you got through high school, your first thought was

Robert: Oh, I was thinking carpentry.

Mother: No, and then you said to me that you would, that you would like to take about a year before you started college.

Robert: Yeah, I was thinking about taking a year off, you know, to decide what I really wanted to do, and then I decided to come here right off.

Whiting: O.K. Good enough. Was that, sounds like you talked to your mother about maybe taking a year off. Did it work like that? You know how that went?

Mother: Well, he told me that, you know, that he had decided that he was going to take the year off and was going to go work and see, and you know, give himself a chance to see what he'd like to do, and I said well, it's your decision, and then before you know it, you started talking to your sister's boyfriend there.

Robert: He is an Alumni there. He said it was really a good school.

Mother: And he kind of psyched him up on Springfield.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: We knew nothing, I knew nothing about Springfield. He didn't either, but they got to talking and ah

Robert: It's a good school.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: He was kind of excited about it after

Right in the beginning of the interview, one can get a sense of mother's expertise concerning her knowledge of her son. She prompted him for the thoughts she was thinking. This exemplified enmeshment.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: But his original thought was to take a year

Whiting: Take a year off.

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: To see which way he wanted to go.

Whiting: Did you come up in the spring for an interview? Did you do any of those things?

Robert: Yes.

Mother: But, everything was a last minute thing. Matter of fact, // he was one of the last ones to get in.

Robert: I was really undecided. //

Whiting: Is that kind of a style of how Robert does things or?

Mother: Well, no, basically no, I wouldn't say that.

Robert: No, I'm usually really prompt on things, usually.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: But like this was a decision, I wasn't too sure on, but I decided to come.

Whiting: O.K. When did, ah, when did you first sense that things weren't going O.K., and this maybe wasn't the right decision for you?

Robert: Ah, a few weeks ago. I wasn't sure if this was what I really wanted, but I figured that maybe if I stuck it

After the mother originally stated she knew nothing about the decision to attend Springfield College, it became clear that she knew everything about Robert's plans. This was interactional evidence of an enmeshed relationship between mother and son.

out a few weeks, or whatever, you know, I'd get to like it.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: But I didn't like it.

Mother: There's, there's no chance in, ah, ah, say somebody leaving for a few weeks and, you know, thinking you know about what's happening, you know.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Because that, that can happen to a person, I think.

Whiting: Sure.

Mother: Something you come up with and decide but yet, ah, a week or two goes by, and you say, you know, I miss it all.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know, that can happen in any walk of life, I think.

Whiting: Sure.

Robert: Well I think I'd miss, you know, the place. It's just that the field that I was, you know, my major, I wasn't too sure on.

Whiting: O.K. What were you majoring in?

Robert: P.E.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: I figured it wasn't, you know, for me.

Mother: Actually, what, actually what it is as far as P.E. is concerned, you feel as though you're not as good as

This sequence gave the first clue to the vagueness of the family's communication style. In effect, Mrs. Rush was asking if Robert could take a break from school and return later. He, in the same vague communication style, let it be known that he was not interested in such a plan.

A good example of enmeshment as mother described how Robert had to be feeling.

you thought you were!

Robert: Um.

Mother: You know, you, see, you, you anticipate too much, you know. He does that, with I think, with a lot of things.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Um, he's got to be, let's hurry up, let's get it done, you know. That type of thing.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And, ah, like for instance Friday night when he came home, he was so nervous, he had me nervous, you know, and without saying anything. O.K.? It's just a feeling, and I said, O.K., have supper, you know, take a deep breath, five minutes, you know, then get some school work. But he doesn't know how to relax, I don't think.

Whiting: O.K. And it sounds like that spills over to you or other people around him?

Robert: Well, it did, it did Friday night. I was, literally, I was literally shaking, honestly speaking, you know.

END

Whiting: What is she saying as far as you not being as good as you thought? I wasn't sure what that was.

Robert: Well

Mother: (Interrupting) Well, can you explain that more clearly as far as in your mind.

Again mother demonstrated her expertise concerning her son. Clear evidence of an enmeshed relationship.

This sequence highlighted the enmeshed quality of this relationship. Mother acknowledged that Robert's stress immediately effected her.

The researcher asked Robert a direct question about his mother's statement that he discovered, while at college, that he was not as skilled as he thought he was. Again she immediately interrupted and tried to speak for him.

Robert: What I said to you?

Mother: Yah, and I, I know, exactly what you are talking about. (spoken emphatically and convincingly)

Robert: About like in athletics.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: Like I thought I was better, you know, like, then I came here, and I realized there's a lot better people

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: and I just had to work a little hard.

Mother: But that doesn't mean anything?

Robert: No.

Mother: You find that everywhere with everything.

Robert: Yah.

END

Robert: I talked to two kids in my dorm, a couple of my good friends, and they feel the same way.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I know Robert, what you should have done instead of talking to kids in your dorm. You should have tried to talk to people like him. (Whiting)

Robert: Um.

Mother: Or another professor or somebody else and try to make them, you know, try to get through to them so they could help you understand, you know, what your problem was.

Mother spoke with conviction that she understood what was happening but concluded with vague comments which were probably intended to be helpful.

Here Mrs. Rush criticized Robert's attempt to talk to peers about his experience at the college. He should do things her way.

Whiting: You said there was a lot of things happening all at once as far as Robert coming to school. What, I'm not sure what those were?

Robert: Well, I'm saying getting use to the dorm and different teachers and stuff like that.

Mother: Leaving a girl he's been dating for a year.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And ah, I think sometimes, that, you know, that's hard, it's very hard to come to college, ah, when you have been going steady, and I'm not, I'm not, don't misunderstand me, I'm not blaming Susan for this situation.

Robert: Oh, I know, I know.

Mother: What I'm trying to say is, it's a lot easier to leave home, you know, mother is mother, you know, sister is sister, you know, (laughing) who really cares, you know, but your girl, I mean that's another thing and ah, I think, that has, you know, that's part of the scale.

Robert: Um, who knows. Something like that. Like I came home this weekend, and Sunday I didn't want to come back.

Mother: Ya, ya.

Robert: That's when I realized I shouldn't be here, you know, if I don't want to be here, you know, come back and be here.

Whiting: And you said your dad

Robert: He drove me back, but ah, I figured, maybe, you know, another couple of weeks I could maybe. It

It was worthwhile to see what happened when Mrs. Rush was asked a direct question. Robert responded for her. It pointed out his over-involvement with his mother.

Here mother offered her perception of the real reason for his leaving college, but in a way that would offer no possibility for conflict. A low tolerance for conflict was evidence of enmeshment.

would work out but

Mother: You see Robert has a habit, he, what happened here was two weeks ago, he should have spoke up, two weeks ago when he started this thing, and then two weeks ago, he perhaps could have talked to different ones.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I don't mean kids in the dorm because, let's face it, half of them are probably all feeling the same way, truthfully speaking.

END

Whiting: You implied that for you to leave home, um, is something she has been trying to encourage you to do in bits and pieces, whether to go to Florida for a week or go to the Cape for a week, um

Mother: Get away, just get away from it all, you know, get away from me, get away from girl, you know, just get away from his environment.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: You know, to know you've got to find out what that world is all about.

Whiting: Has there been some kind of hesitation on your part to do that, Robert?

Robert: Ya, there was.

Whiting: O.K. Has there been some fear that what might, what might happen to the family if you were to leave?

Robert: I don't know.

The attempted shift to see where his father may fit into the scheme of things was quickly passed over as mother again criticized Robert's independent handling of the situation.

This sequence began with Robert being asked a direct question and Mrs. Rush answered. To see if Robert feared the consequences of leaving home was the purpose of the next question. Again the interactional evidence for the over-involved relationship between Mrs. Rush and Robert was provided.

Mother: I think he knows I'm, I'm quite capable, no?

Robert: I know your capable.

Mother: (Laughing) It was money I would say, it was money.

Robert: Ya, it was money.

Mother: (Laughing) I knew it was money, you didn't want to let loose with a buck.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: (Laughing) He's one of those penny pinchers, believe me when I tell you.

Robert: Ya.

Mother: Oh, does he hate to spend a dime. As a matter

Robert: You do too.

END

Whiting: (To Peg) Have you felt something missing with Robert gone?

Peg: (Laughs) I miss him. (laughs) Someone to talk to and, you know.

Mother: Fight with. (spoken with authority) That's what she really wants to say. (laughs)

Peg: Oh mom. (dejectedly)

Mother: She really wants to say fights, you know, the arguing, I mean.

END

This sequence indicated the enmeshed, but less intense, quality of the relationship between Peg and her mother. Mrs. Rush spoke with authority about what Peg was thinking and, in comparison to Robert, Peg objected to her mother's intrusion.

These five transcripts demonstrated the enmeshed quality of the

family as Mrs. Rush was clearly the expert on her children's feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Members, primarily Mrs. Rush, interrupted each other's conversations and spoke for each other. The preceding structural map which indicated a strong, stable alliance with Robert and Mrs. Rush overinvolved with each was seen repeatedly in other transactional sequences.

For example, when this researcher attempted to join Peg after she had remained attentive but silent, for the first several minutes, the interaction quickly shifted back to Robert and his mother. This happened again later in the interview as demonstrated by the second excerpt. These two transcripts follow.

Whiting: In terms of like your mother saying hey, when all of a sudden Robert's upset, she gets upset, is that something that happens to everybody? When your mom gets upset, can you tell your mom's upset?

Peg: Ya.

Whiting: She's upset and you get upset or Robert gets upset, and you get upset. Is that how things kind of work? Or?

Mother: Um. Well, this is another thing too with Robert, I think, ah we've been very close and I think he has had a very comfortable home. Ah. In many ways, you know, it has been somewhat secure.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And, ah, I think he enjoys his home too much, which there is nothing wrong with that, but ah, he wasn't the type of boy that like hung around

This sequence occurred after Mrs. Rush had talked about how she was upset when Robert was upset. To see if this was unique to their relationship, Peg was asked a direct question about this to see how she fitted into this enmeshed pattern. Again the reader can get a sense of the difficulty the researcher had in asking members direct questions as well as the intensity of the relationship between Robert and his mother.

corners or in bar rooms or things like that.

Whiting: Um. Well, you have taught him some good things.

Mother: Ya. He's been just one of the, you know, good average boys.
(not spoken with approval)

Robert: (Laughs quietly)

Mother: And when you, um, I can understand, I can understand how he feels, ah, missing a home, you know, coming, too many things have happened to him you know, boom, boom, boom, boom.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Ah, it was, you never went away anywhere, you know. I had, remember when I said to you I would like to see you go away for a week.

Robert: Ya.

Mother: Go to Florida, go down to the Cape, do something, get away from the house, and this is what I was trying to explain, you know, just get away by yourself and kind of think a little bit, you know, but no, he had to work all summer long, and he gave himself two weeks before he started college, and I didn't think that was very fair.

END

Whiting: There has been somewhat of a campaign to, change Robert a little bit, to make him more cos

Mother: (Interrupting) More outgoing.

Whiting: cosmopolitan, more outgoing,

more well-rounded in a sense. Do you have those issues with her?

Mother: No, she's, ah, ah. This is what I don't understand about him now. Robert ran for president.

Robert: I was vice president of my senior class.

Mother: He was like I said, he was very outgoing.

Robert: Not very outgoing.

Mother: Well, oh I would say as far as an all boy's school.

Robert: Oh, ya.

Mother: I would say as far as that goes. Not coed. You're limited to, but ah, leading your whole football team.

Robert: Ya, we lost nine games in a row. (laughs)

Mother: (Laughs) Ya, but still it was still fun.

END

Again the reader can get a sense of the intensity of the enmeshed mother-son relationship. Mrs. Rush immediately shifted the focus off of Peg and went back to Robert. The intensity of the alliance was such that Robert found it impossible to disagree with his mother's perceptions.

The following three lengthy excerpts again highlighted the nature of this enmeshed system. With Mrs. Rush announcing her marital intentions, the researcher was shown the stressful developmental issues in the family as well as the possible contextual meaning of Robert's withdrawing from Springfield College. The reader should pay particular attention to the high level of loyalty members felt for each other and the resulting impact this had on members' sense of autonomy. Also of critical importance was the nature of the central role Robert played

in the family as he interacted as a supporter of both his mother and sister in this stressful interaction.

Whiting: Robert's confidence has taken a blow. (this was said earlier by Mrs. Rush)

Robert: Um, it has.

Mother: Ya, because he was, like I said, he was always in good spirits, always, and ah, if he played football, he always participated in everything, all through school, his grades were great. His ah, ah if they lost, he had a normal ticked off mood, you know. Everything was, you know, all was just, ah, everything has gone down hill.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know, but honestly speak, honestly speaking, why? (directed to researcher)

Whiting: Have you asked him?

Mother: Well, he said he's unhappy at what he's doing.

Robert: That's mainly what it is, plus being away from home. Maybe I need a couple of years, a year or two to decide, you know, what I really want.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And this is why I feel that at ah, if he feels this way, he's not going to be good at anything he's doing right now.

Whiting: Well, what does right now look like? I mean, um, what do you see happening? You're going home tonight. What's tomorrow look like? What's next week look like, Robert?

The researcher blocked the attempt to be drawn into answering the question and purposely directed the question back to where it belonged.

Up to this point, the researcher was primarily joining with the system and going with the family's style. It was now time to be more active and direct.

Robert: I'm going to look for a job,
probably.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: You know work at that and,
you know, realize that

Mother: Do you feel insecure yet?

Robert: Ya, a little bit.

Mother: You feel very secure at home!
(not a question but a statement)

Robert: Ya. (pause)

Whiting: (Stomach grumbles loudly)
Excuse me, I didn't eat.

Mother: You didn't eat. Oh, don't
worry about it. I do that with or
without eating. Um, (sigh) okay now.
(pause) I'm going, I'm going to, I'm
going to be getting married. I told
this to Robert too and I don't know
if this has any, if this has any
relation to what,

Whiting: I don't know.

Mother: This is what's happening here.

Robert: No it hasn't. Like actually
I'm somewhat insecure but,

Whiting: When do you plan to do that?
Is that something in the next few
weeks, or months, or year?

Mother: Two months.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: (Laughs) As a matter, ah,
ah, you're not going to believe this,
right, but I feel guilty, I actually
feel guilty now, can you believe that?
Because in a sense, ah, I can

A good clue that some-
thing was about to
happen!

Unquestionably, Mrs.
Rush's marital plan was
something that this re-
searcher felt needed
further explanation.

Here was the first evi-
dence which indicated
the difficulty Mrs. Rush
had declaring her own
autonomy from the family.

Robert: I don't think she should,
cause that's what she wants, right?

Mother: I know, but I just it's ah,
it, she (Peg) looks at me funny,
(laughs) like I'm a traitor or
something.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: You know, you can almost
read their minds. I can anyway.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: Not mine, cause I'm not
feeling that way.

Mother: Huh.

Robert: I'm not feeling that way.

Whiting: How are you feeling, Peg?
What do you think about this?

Peg: I don't know.

Mother: Tell the truth.

Whiting: I mean, have you talked about
it, or is this

Mother: Tell the truth, yes we did.

Peg: About her getting married?

Whiting: Ya.

Peg: Ya, I think it's too soon.

Mother: (Laughs)

Peg: (Laughs) I think it's too
soon.

Mother: Excuse me I have to laugh.

Peg: Well she, she just comes home,
I'm getting married, you know, I mean

Robert moved swiftly to
support his mother.

Mrs. Rush reported on
her capacity to read her
children's minds and
this was challenged for
the first time by Robert.
It was felt that it
would be important to
know what Peg thought.

Mother: What do you mean it's too soon? I've been going with this person for a year and a half.

Peg: Ya, on weekends, ma.

Mother: (Laughing) I'm forty-four years old.

Peg: On weekends, ma.

Mother: (Laughing) You know, what do I have to go with him five years?

Peg: No, but on weekends.

Mother: (Laughing) I feel like I'm the kid in this one.

Peg: Ma, cut it out. (pleading)

Mother: Ya.

Peg: This is weird, you don't know.

Robert: Take a back seat here. (leans back)

Mother: (Laughing) No, I mean, that's a laugh.

Peg: (Inaudible) a psychiatrist talking.

Mother: (Laughing) I haven't been going with him long enough.

Peg: Well, I don't know.

Whiting: Well, I think it's natural that kids have some concerns.

Mother: (Laughing) I know, but I have to laugh at that.

Peg: Ma, ma, you only see him on weekends.

Mother: No, it's like me telling her

Mrs. Rush's plans to marry introduced a stressful issue within the family. Although Peg was commanded to tell the truth, her feelings and concerns were minimized. Robert announced that he was going to stay out of this issue, but re-entered soon after.

when she's eighteen, you're not going with him long enough.

Peg: No.

Mother: (Laughing) I only see him on weekends because he lives in another state.

Peg: I know, but, well, you told me to tell you how I felt.

Mother: I know, // I know.

Peg: And now your laughing at me. //

Whiting: No, I asked you, you know, and it sounds like it's been something,

Mother: I'm not laughing at you Peg, I'm laughing at myself. (laughs) I feel like I'm the teenager really.

Whiting: You, you were wondering if there was any connection.

Mother: I was, I was wondering, you know.

Robert: I was just concerned for her (Peg), that's what I was worried about, like if she was happy.

Robert reentered the conversation showing how in the system he was a supporter of both his mother and Peg. For the first time, the researcher heard there was another sibling.

Whiting: Um um.

Robert: Like I called her on the phone, my sister called me and said Peg was upset, and so I called her and talked to her for a little while, I wanted to make sure. (very concerned)

Whiting: So there is another sister?

Robert: Ya.

Whiting: How many kids are there in the family?

Mother: Three.

Robert: She's living on her own.

Whiting: How old is she?

Robert: She's twenty-four.

Mother: Twenty-three.

Robert: Like I wanted to make sure,
like she was happy.

Whiting: O.K. And she called you to
tell you that Peg was upset?

Robert: No, my girlfriend called me,
that's right, and ah, she said Peg
was really upset, so I called her one
day from school.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I know, but that shouldn't
concern you.

Robert: Oh, I know it didn't. I was
just worried that's the only thing,
but it wasn't affecting my, ah,
grades or nothing like that, I just
always had that on my mind like.

Whiting: When do you, have you, when
did you announce these plans?

Mother: About a week ago.

END

Mother: And they want you to feel in
a sense, they want you to feel guilty.
Honestly speaking.

Whiting: Well I think they're

Mother: (Interrupting) You are
betraying the, // ah, it's natural

Robert: I think it would be good for
her, to tell you the truth.

After getting side-tracked with the new member in the family, Robert again voiced his concerns about Peg. He agreed with his mother, but acknowledged that he was concerned about the recent developments at home. The family appeared in turmoil and stress.

Mother: natural thing, // but I know
I need it. I feel that I, I'm not
really betraying them, I'm not leaving
the, I'm not, ah, you're ready to cry.

Peg: Ma.

Mother: You really are.

Peg: I am, ma.

Mother: And ah, it's not a matter of
me saying, hey I'll see you later,
goodbye, you know, it's been nice.
It's not that. Um, I ah, I'm closer
here in Springfield than I, you know,
with my new move, I'll be closer to
Springfield than I am right now.

Whiting: Oh, you're going to move?

Mother: (Nods)

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: To (names nearby state).

Whiting: O.K. So everybody, help me
out.

Robert: I don't know if I'll move.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: That's the thing, right now.

Mother: Help you out on what?

Whiting: Um. You're going to get
married in two months? Right? And
you're going to move to

Mother: (Names state).

Whiting: O.K. Peg, where are you going?

Peg: I'm staying here until I
graduate, well (names home town). Right?

Robert: Graduate from junior high.

Mrs. Rush demonstrated
the difficulty she was
having justifying her
own autonomous plans.
So stressed, she stated
that she would now be
living closer to Spring-
field which was irrele-
vant because Robert was
leaving.

An attempt was made here
by the researcher to try
to slow things down and
bring some order and
clarity to the intense
situation.

Peg: Till June, I guess, right?
After my recital?

Mother: She wants to stay here, stay
in (home town).

Whiting: O.K. Who are you going to
live with?

Peg: My father, I think.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: (Laughs) Oh, she, the thing
is I could wait until next June.

Whiting: Uh huh, um.

Mother: That's no big deal, O.K., but
it's a matter of, um, of you doing
what you want, and I have to, you
know, still accommodate you.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And, ah, I can try to accom-
modate her, with, ah, her either
living with her father or my sister
until she graduates and coming down
for weekends.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And perhaps getting use to
the environment.

Whiting: Uh huh. Have you lived with
your dad?

Peg: No. When I was a little,
but I, I don't remember.

Whiting: O.K.

Peg: It's going to be weird having
a man around, that's another reason.

Mother: What?

Again the enmeshed
quality of the family
was demonstrated as
everyone took the
opportunity to speak
for Peg.

Mrs. Rush was struggling
to justify her plans.

The researcher was
speaking very gently
again trying to lower
the stress.

Peg: Having, you know, I don't
know, it's going to be weird. (laughs)

Mother: (Laughs)

Peg: (Inaudible) all over her face.

Peg spoke for herself
but mother had to
explain further.

Whiting: So, you, you're gonna

Mother: She says it's going to be kind
of weird, you know.

Peg: // Ma, it's, it's

Robert: Let her explain. (spoken to
Peg)

Robert moved to support
his mother.

Mother: Me being married and, you know.

Peg: Ya.

Robert: Let her explain, let her
explain how she feels.

Mother: A, ah, man around the house. //

Whiting: Uh huh. It's going to be
different.

Mother: I know, I understand that.

Peg: Ya.

Whiting: Um, are you going to sell, are
you in an apartment now, or do you own
a home?

Mother: I own a home, yes.

Whiting: Are you going to sell that?

Mother: Ya.

Whiting: O.K. Um, where are you going,
Robert?

Robert: Well, my plans were if I was
staying in school, I talked to my
sister a while back, I was going to

live with her.

Whiting: O.K.

Robert: So now, you know, my girlfriend there, you know, like, I'm away from her now, and I didn't want to be away from her all year.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Robert: But now that I'm going back to (home town) and see what happens, if I want to go to a community school around there.

Whiting: Where are you going to live?

Robert: Ah, probably with my sister.
(nervously made clicking noise with his tongue)

Whiting: O.K., and Peg, you're not sure whether you will live with your sister or your dad. Is it your sister or?

Mother: My sister.

Whiting: O.K.

Peg: I don't know.

Whiting: O.K. Well, there's a lot going on.

Mother: Well, everyone is somewhat close, you know, to the whole family, pretty well. You know, if you get sick in the hospital, if one's not there, the other one will be there. That type of thing.

One was able to see how the family, which was seemingly coming apart at the seams, had great difficulty being direct and clear about their ideas, feelings, and plans.

The system was maintained with a dramatic change in the conversation.

END

Whiting: Really there's been a lot of things happening in the last two months.

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: As far as your daughter leaving, Robert leaving, you plan to get married, so there's a lot going on.

Mother: Yup.

Whiting: When these kind of things happen, when there have been events, where people get stirred up and crisis, ah, who does the family look to for support, help, is it, is it pretty, ah, do other family members kind of come around and

Robert: No.

Mother: And

Robert: Any crisis, her. If there's any kind of family problems.

Mother: Oh, ya.

Robert: Even aunts, uncles, anybody, they always go to her.

Whiting: O.K. Who do you go to?

Robert: That's my opinion.

Whiting: O.K. I mean usually.

Robert: She handles, if there's problems.

Mother: Ya.

Robert: Everybody goes to her, you know, and like, you feel like that, like she's going to survive everybody, you know.

Mother: This is why I said with my oldest daughter, saying I was driving her out, I can't understand it.

This sequence highlighted Robert's capacity to move into the executive subsystem as he spoke for the whole family.

Here was the first hint about Mrs. Rush's relationship with her oldest daughter.

Robert: And that's why I kind of

Mother: Because Robert, you know

Robert: Oh, I know.

Mother: nobody made it more convenient than I did for a twenty-three year old girl.

Robert: And I can see her move, you know, get married, cause like, she's had to support a family all her life, and, ah, she's supported a house and gave us everything really nice, and now that she has somebody, he's got an excellent job, and, ah, you know, take a load off her.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Robert: And Peg will have the best things, and she won't have to struggle, and she won't, like when she's working, she's tired.

Mother: (To Peg) Why can't I smile?

Peg: Because you make me nervous.

Robert: And, ah, like, I've been there. Like when she is working now, and she comes home from work, she's miserable. It's from the pressures and, ah, Peg has to listen to it. But now I feel like, you know, she's had enough, and, ah, she doesn't really have to really worry about things too much any more. (the end of this was spoken in a painful manner)

Whiting: O.K. So it sounds like that you're a big supporter of mom.

Robert: Ya.

Whiting: That your, that's one of the things you have done is, is be supportive to her and help her.

Robert clearly allied with his mother, showing once again the diffuse boundaries in the system.

Robert was in the position to support his mother's marital plans and to reassure Peg that things would be better for her now because their mother would be taken care of in her marriage. Robert seemed burdened, but incapable of disengaging himself at this stressful period in the family's life.

Robert: Ya. And I feel like, like I'm eighteen now, so I'm a little bit insecure, like you know, of being away from home, but it's not like

Mother: (Interrupting) He's capable.

Robert: Ya, I'm capable, ya.

Mother: He's a capable person.

Robert: Ya, if I had to I would even for a little while.

Mother: I don't think it is, um, unusual for an eighteen year old boy to be somewhat insecure.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know, that's you know, ah, pretty well known.

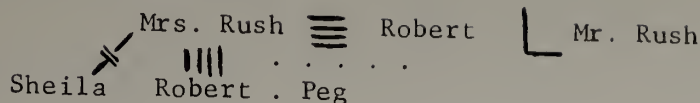
This was an interesting sequence for it seemed like neither Mrs. Rush nor Robert could tolerate having the alliance pointed out. It reinforced this researcher's ideas about the difficulties the family had in completing transactions and bringing closure to issues. There was a complete change in the nature of the conversation, while transactionally it remained the same; Robert supported mother, mother supported Robert.

END

These preceding excerpts clearly demonstrated Robert's capacity to shift his support back and forth with his mother and his sister. When analyzing Robert's leaving college in the context of his family, this researcher speculated that Robert withdrew from college so that he would be more available to help Peg manage when their mother remarried and moved away. He was strongly in favor of his mother remarrying and it was postulated that he could help ensure the chances of this happening by returning home. He was unable to complete his independent plans as he was needed more at home at this time of crisis.

The preceding segments also gave clues about the nature of the relationships the interviewed members had with other family members. As a result, a hypothesized structural map which included other members

of the family appeared as:



This map indicated Robert's capacity to move within subsystems, the conflicted relationship between Sheila and her mother, and the distant, disengaged position of Mr. Rush.

The next excerpt highlighted the stress in the family regarding Mrs. Rush's marital plans. This sequence was confusing as the researcher had left the room to get some paper towels (only thing available) for Peg as she was crying. This transcript began shortly after the researcher had returned to the interview. The researcher got confused as he thought they were talking about Peg's father when, in fact, they were talking about Mrs. Rush's fiancée. The sequence was important as it gave evidence about how information got communicated in the family, their style of indirect and incomplete transactions, and their questionable problem solving capacity.

Peg: I know ma, but it is going to be different.

Mother: Well being fifteen is going to be different and being sixteen is going to be even more different, and wait till eighteen that's really going to be different.

Here was a good example of how problems and concerns get resolved.

Peg: I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about what's happening now. (pleading)

Because Peg's relationship with her mother was less intense, it appeared easier for her to challenge her mother.

Mother: Peg, life is different all the time.

Whiting: How do you mean Peg, what's different now?

Peg: Well, like I never grew up with my father and all of a sudden I'm going to have someone there all the time, and it's going to be different.

Whiting: O.K.

Peg: You know.

Whiting: Have you talked to him about it?

Peg: No. I don't talk, well, I just say hi to him.

Mother: Well why don't you try talking to him, he is very easy to talk to.

Peg: I know (names mother's fiancée), but I really don't know him.

Robert: I know him pretty well.

Mother: Only because you don't really want to get to know him, Peg, right?

Peg: Why do you believe that?

Mother: But like he told me, his main concern is not me, his main concern is you. He is more concerned about you than he is about me and anything else. But, the thing is, when he talks to you, you have the habit of cutting him short. Right?

Peg: Uh.

Mother: So you can't.

Whiting: So who has talked about you moving in with him, Peg, like is that something that

Peg: Well, we really didn't talk

The researcher assumed they were discussing Peg living with her father when, in fact, they were discussing Peg's relationship with her mother's fiancée. Only after repeated viewings of the video was the name of Mrs. Rush's fiancée heard.

The diffuse boundaries enabled Robert to comment on an issue that was between mother and Peg.

Already the boundaries in the new planned marriage appeared enmeshed as Mrs. Rush maintained that her fiancée was more concerned about Peg than about her.

At the time the researcher thought the conversation was related to Peg's moving in with her father.

about it, not much.

Robert: We never did ma, really.

Again Robert moved into the executive subsystem.

Peg: I was just last, last

Mother: No, we haven't talked about it that much. I have, I have actually, tell you the truth, honestly speaking, // O.K.

Robert: She never told me. //

Mother: I haven't had a chance to really, ah, and even up until today. I don't really, honestly feel as though, um, I have had a chance.

Robert and his mother demonstrated how information got communicated indirectly in the family.

Robert: Because I haven't been told directly by her that // her

Mother: You know //

Robert: My sister told me, she told me over the phone.

Mother: It's just been one thing after another, and I just to say, you know, this is my turn, you know. I want to do this, this, this, and this, I just haven't got that together yet.

Again Mrs. Rush demonstrated her difficulty with her own autonomy.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Right. I, I just more or less put myself together, and ah, we talked about it yesterday, him and I, and ah, we said we were going to talk to the children, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then I got the telephone call from Robert. Well, you know, forget that whole situation now, I mean now

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: this is what I am mainly concerned about.

END

The following transcript gave the researcher some evidence about the nature of the relationship between Mrs. Rush and her former husband. This sequence demonstrated how they continued their conflicts through Peg.

Mother: I'm looking out for the welfare of my kids, that's all I care about, and right now at fourteen and a half her mind is not grown up enough to discuss what's happened between him (former husband) and I. Until she gets old enough to say, I'd like to know what happened, and then if I want to tell her fine, and if I don't, it is none of her business. O.K.? The same is when she gets married, and that's her business, it is none of my business or her children's business.

Mrs. Rush's powerful use of language that had to leave Peg confused. It was also a way of leaving the father, mother, daughter relationship without closure, a common theme in this family.

Whiting: But, it might be worthwhile saying that to your former husband.

Mother: Right. If I told you the last conversation I had with him, you wouldn't believe it. You wouldn't believe me. O.K. You just can not, you can't, and it is all over. It was all over her and her wanting a pair of pants for school.

Peg: That's why, you know

Mother: (Interrupting) That's what this whole situation came about, right. She was crying and my sister lives upstairs, I'm on the first floor, and she was ranting and raving and crying and I'll never speak to him again, and I hate him, you know, the whole story, and I said, what happened? Oh, he doesn't want to buy me my pants for school and blah, blah, blah, blah. Just one pair of pants. So she was crying, and I mean it was just like somebody stuck a knife in me. (laughs) So I picked up the phone, and I said,

Stresses in one member spilled over to another member, evidence of enmeshment.

ah, what did you say to Peg? And he said I told her that you won your point in court. I said that's great, that was great to tell that to that kid, and ah, I said you know, it's too bad that you're not deserving of the three children I gave you. And I hate to tell you what he said to me and hung up. All right, so you tell me if I can get through to somebody like that.

Here the researcher was shown the conflicted nature of the relationship between Mrs. Rush and her former husband, and how, on this occasion, Peg was the focus of their conflict.

Whiting: Sounds like there has been a few years of struggles there.

Mother: Ya, ya, because you see I won a fifteen dollar a week more alimony in court, and it's been a resentment since that. Because of cost of living and things.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Peg: And remember I told you I would never talk to him again, remember. Cause I wouldn't, remember that?

Mother: Yes.

Peg: All right. Well so I asked him, I wanted just to try to understand, you know, I was just saying that, cause that killed me too, you know. You know, I wanted to kill him, you know. Why should he say that about that? Say something like that to my mother, you know. That's why he was trying, he wasn't really trying to tell for me to hate you. Telling, you know what happened, it was just trying to make me understand why he said it, not

Mother: I know, Peg. Because he does this, this is what I am trying to point out, see he honestly speaking, honestly speaking, does not do these things maliciously, he doesn't. Believe me when I tell you, and this is why I can't get through to him with these other things

Again the family showed the difficult time members had listening and completing transactions. Things did not get resolved in this family.

because he just, ah, like I tried to explain to Peg, you know, everybody is on levels. We're all on levels O.K., and like you are up here and somebody is down here, you just can not communicate. I don't care how hard you try, you know, and until somebody comes up to this level or you go down to that level, you are just not going to get to understand that person.

Whiting: Right.

Mother: O.K. And you can only have so much patience, believe me, and you can only try so long.

Whiting: And it sounds like

Mother: O.K.?

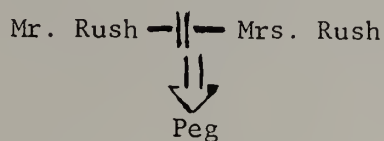
Whiting: There have been some struggles.

Mother: But, there are things, I mean, I have kept to myself, right. You have to keep them to yourself, right?

Mrs. Rush shared her isolated position with few supports.

END

These transactions provided this hypothesized structural map of this triad. Parental conflicts were detoured through Peg.



Toward the end of the interview, this researcher made some attempts to influence the family's transactions in an effort to gain information about the system's capacity for restructuring. The system became predictably stressed as the family had demonstrated many times during the interview that they had difficulty completing transactions and staying

on track. This final lengthy sequence demonstrated the family stress and their difficulty dealing directly with issues and conflicts. In this writer's initial structural assessment, there was mention of a concern for Peg and her position in the family. The previous sequence and the following one were the source of this researcher's concern. Peg was able to diffuse the conflict between her parents and between Robert and his mother. In this sequence, she initiated this by supporting Robert and getting attacked by her mother, while the second time she was drawn into the conversation by her mother.

Whiting: As for one, Robert, you are going home looking for a job, and right now you are talking about staying with your sister, right? Ah, she has a place on her own or, have you talked to her about that?

Robert: Ya, but she doesn't know the thing I just did (dropout). She said, you know, if you want to stay in (home town) in the summer time.

Mother: I don't really like that idea, Robert, honestly.

Robert: Well I don't think there is anything wrong with it at all.

Mother: Well there is nothing completely wrong with it, but, ah, ah (pause) I don't believe you are going to get that much more, ah, self sufficient there in that atmosphere, and you know what I'm talking about.

Whiting: Do you know what she's talking about?

Robert: No, not really. What are you talking about?

Peg: First,

Here the researcher purposefully challenged mother's mind reading capacity. Robert responded to the researcher's challenge of enmeshment, and Peg made a move to get in.

Mother: Well, what kind of atmosphere are you going to be in?

Robert: They are not married, is that what you are saying?

Mother: Well, that's that's immaterial.

Robert: Well what do you mean?

Mother: Well I mean sitting down and ah, you know, you are going to be involved with somebody that just does a lot of talking. He does a lot, a lot of talking, he's not a doer at all. (Sheila's boyfriend)

Robert: He's doing now.

Mother: He is?

Robert: Ya, he's doing now. (pause)
O.K. He's working as a mental health assistant now, he's working with the state. He's you know, climbing up the ladder slowly and, ah,

Peg: He's getting there, he's trying at least.

Robert: Right.

Peg: You don't have to get

Mother: Peg, I, I don't care! I don't care! I am not, can't you understand, I don't care about (names Sheila's boyfriend), there's only three people I care about. That is all. I don't care what this man is doing with his life, I don't care what the teachers upstairs are doing with their life, or whatever or anybody around here, anywhere in the world. I honestly don't care! O.K.! I care about who you are involved with or your sis. I can not do anything for your sister, there's nothing, that's her life. She's twenty-three years old. Fine! Great!

With the diffuse sibling subsystem boundary, the researcher was now shown how Peg moved to ally with her brother. Look what happened!

Peg was able to defuse the conflict between Mrs. Rush and Robert as Peg got attacked. The system maintained itself as Robert and his mother were not able to resolve their conflict.

But I can try to get through to you.
You know, kids have a

Whiting: Let's, let's go back for a minute. Robert said he's going to live with his sister. You don't like the idea. Ah, what are you going to do here? Let's, what's going to happen?

Mother: I can't see why he can't come live with me in (names state). Why can't he?

Robert: Because I have a girlfriend back home, that's why.

Whiting: Can the two of you talk about it for a minute, what are you going to do?

Mother: Because you have a girlfriend back home.

Robert: That's why, ya.

Mother: And you are going to revolve everything around this one person?

Robert: No.

Mother: At eighteen years old?

Robert: No. I have to see what I want first, and I want to be involved with her, and I want to make sure I know what I'm doing.

Mother: Well, ah (pause) I'm going to (names state).

Robert: Let's see what happens.

Mother: And ah, (pause) and I really don't honestly know what to tell you. (to Whiting)

Whiting: Well tell, I want to see the two of you resolve this a little bit.

The researcher purposefully brought the focus back to Robert and his mother to see how they would tolerate this restructuring move.

Transactional evidence which highlighted their low tolerance for conflict.

Mother attempted to redirect the interaction back to the researcher.

Researcher redirects it back to mother and son.

Robert: I really don't want to go to (names state). I just. (pause) Maybe in a couple of years, I'd have a chance, I have a chance to go to aeronautical school? Is that what it is? (looking to mother)

Robert looked to his mother for her knowledge of his plans.

Mother: (Nods)

Robert: Maybe I'll, that's what I'll do, I'll move there cause that's where the school is. But right now I want to live in (home town). And I want to find out who I am and see what I really want.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: O.K.

Whiting: How O.K.?

Mother: O.K. Now, you're eighteen years old

Robert: Right.

Mother: And you say, I can understand you saying mom, I want to stay here, my girl is here, I want to see what I want to do with my life, I this, I that, it's all I, O.K.? Then maybe in a couple of years you're going to decide you're going to want to go to school, and you're going to pick up the phone and say, oh mom, I've decided I want to go to at, you know, school for (names place) do something for me. Ah, I don't know, I think it's too much of an I, I, I. I think you're not, I don't honestly believe that you're going to get yourself together, around just constantly being around your girlfriend, you know, and being pampered by your sister. You know that, you know your sister will smother you to death, and, in a sense, you might like that.

Robert's independence was severely attacked.

Robert: Maybe I will, maybe I won't.

Mother: You will, I know you will.
But is that what you really really want?

Robert: No, I really don't

Mother: (Interrupting) You know, we all like to be pampered, but we still have to know what's right and wrong. (pause)

Robert: I, I just want to be involved with her. I don't want to live, you know, spend my whole life, as of right now around her. I just enjoy being with her, and she's not the reason I quit school. It's, I did not like, you know, being here and the daily routine of this school, this type of school, and ah, what major I was in. I feel if I go home and work, then I can find out what I want. If I want her, if I want, what kind of job. (pause)

Mother: You're going to find that being around her all the time?

Robert: I'm not going to be around her all the time.

Mother: Well Peg made the statement before how she thinks it's too soon for me to get married because I only see him on weekends. Right?

Robert: Right.

Mother: That's a pretty well fair shot I think, of really knowing what you want. (pause)

Peg: What do you mean ma, see him only on weekends and know that you want him?

Mother: Ya. You don't have to be with somebody twenty-four hours a day to know that you want them.

Mrs. Rush defined how Robert would experience this living arrangement.

They were able to get only this far and then Peg was looked to defuse the conflict and she fell right into it. A nice system maintaining interaction.

This hypothesized structural map, based upon the interview data, indicated the conflicted relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Rush with Peg in the role of conflict defuser. It showed Peg again as a defuser when Robert and his mother were conflicted. Robert's position was again indicated in both subsystems, as a result of his ability to flow between the diffuse boundaries in the parental and sibling subsystems. Sheila and her boyfriend were represented by conflicted lines with Mrs. Rush and the disengaged relationship the children had with their father was also indicated.

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Robert's withdrawal from college supported the system's homeostasis because it assisted the family in not changing. By assuming a parental role of helping Peg cope, Robert would remain in the executive subsystem. His position there was further enhanced by continuing to be mother's ally as he supported her difficult decision concerning marriage and moving away. His withdrawing also continued the family myth that he was an insecure boy who relied too heavily on the security of his home. For him to have demonstrated competence away from home would have been a direct

challenge of his mother's image of him as being very insecure and not very outgoing. Going home also gave his mother more opportunities to be an expert on Robert's life. It was speculated that Mrs. Rush would continue to advise Robert about his future plans and what's best for him, thereby maintaining their overinvolved, intense relationship.

7. Capacity for restructuring. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

This last section concluded with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed independently by the research assistant. Also to be included will be final comments on the Rush family.

Both the research assistant's and this researcher's structural assessments were clearly in agreement concerning the nature of the over-involved, enmeshed relationship which dominated the interpersonal transactional pattern between Mrs. Rush and Robert. Without question, the intensity of their involvement infringed upon their capacity for independence. Being such an ally of his mother, it did not surprise this researcher, given the developmental stress and turmoil in the family, that Robert chose to withdraw from college to return home. The nature of the diffuse boundaries within the family impeded Robert from differentiating himself especially at this stressful time in the family.

A comment which the research assistant attached to her structural assessment was important. She stated, "This family seems to be at the point of exploding apart with members going off in all different

directions". Certainly from the interview and watching the video-tapes, this researcher speculated that Robert was willing to sacrifice his own autonomy and return home in an attempt to rescue other members of the family. His returning home helped maintain the pattern of members being overinvolved with each other and prevented change within the family system.

Where the research assistant and the researcher disagreed slightly concerned the placement of Robert in the family hierarchy. The research assistant had him in the parental subsystem whereas this writer placed him in both the sibling subsystem and the parental subsystem. This researcher was of the opinion that there was interactional evidence which merited him being placed in both subsystems.

All of the assessments were in agreement with the nature of the diffuse boundaries between both Peg and her mother and her brother. Also, there was agreement concerning her role as a defuser of conflict. The research assistant highlighted this regarding her relationship with her parents whereas this writer also saw it occurring between Mrs. Rush and Robert. Because of this position, both the research assistant and this researcher had some concerns about how Peg might behave and adjust during the next few months and years. The structural therapy model would suggest that this interactional pattern may result in her becoming symptomatic.

Also in agreement were the perceptions of the boundaries in the marital dyad. All of the assessments hypothesized that the marital relationship was conflicted and that the boundary between Mr. Rush and

the children was rigid.

The only other minor disagreement was found in the hypothesized structural map, concerning Sheila and the boundary between her and her mother. The research assistant placed Sheila in the sibling subsystem indicating diffuse boundaries between her and her mother. After viewing the tapes several times, this researcher was of the opinion that the relationship between Mrs. Rush and Sheila was conflicted. It was hypothesized that this relationship was conflicted because Mrs. Rush appeared to feel helpless and hopeless about her inability to have any influence on her daughter. Both assessments are probably accurate because it is speculated that the conflict between Sheila and her mother were characteristic of an intense, enmeshed relationship.

In summary, all of the structural assessments supported each other considerably. There was strong support for how the family appeared structurally, the developmental issues which were contributing to the family's stress and the reservations about the family's capacity for restructuring.

In conclusion, the Rush family's patterns of interpersonal transactions represented an enmeshed organization. The transactional evidence offered in the transcripts demonstrated clearly the diffuseness of the boundaries within the family. Dyadic communication was incomplete as members intruded into each other's conversations and spoke for each other. Mrs. Rush was inappropriately overinvolved in the sibling subsystem and vice versa. Members' deep sense of loyalty for each other appeared to infringe upon members' ability to be autonomous.

Lastly, enmeshed qualities were shown as stress in members reverberated across subsystems.

Although the family members generously gave of themselves in this moderately intense interview, one pattern which did not appear was that of Robert functioning in the role of conflict defuser between his parents. There was some evidence, however, that Peg was detouring some of the parental conflicts. There was clearer evidence which indicated that she was able to defuse conflict between Robert and his mother. It was interesting to see in this exploratory research that, in this particular interview, conflict defusing behavior was not specific to the dropout student, but rather with another sibling in the family. This supported the notion that in this family there was a low tolerance for conflict between members. This researcher was given a lot of interactional evidence demonstrating members' difficulty with completing transactions and directly staying with concerns at hand, especially at times of conflict. Because the family's threshold for conflict was low, problems were consequently left unresolved.

This family demonstrated that there were several concerns happening, simultaneously, to Robert's leaving home to begin his freshman year at Springfield College. Sheila moved out to live with her boyfriend two days after Robert left for school, his mother's marital announcement, and the confusion about where Peg was to live all seemed to weigh heavily on Robert. His leaving school to return home enabled him to maintain the family's preferred patterns of interaction which opposed autonomy and thrived upon overinvolvement between members.


Section IV - Gold Family

Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On October 15, 1979, this researcher met with Julie Gold. She came to the Dean of Students' Office that morning and indicated that she wanted to withdraw from college at the end of the semester. Since there were approximately six weeks remaining in the semester and no reason to schedule the interview immediately, the researcher agreed with Julie's suggestion that she contact her mother that evening concerning this research project. The following day, Julie reported that her mother was planning to visit her on parents weekend, October 27, and suggested that we meet at this time. On October 27, this researcher met with Mrs. Gold, Julie, and a young married woman who lived upstairs in the Gold house. Mrs. Gold's friend had been invited to accompany her on the hour and three quarters drive from their home to Springfield College.

2. Description of the family. The family consists of Mrs. Gold, a kindergarten teacher with a masters' degree, Shirley age 20, a sophomore in college, and Julie, the 18 year old dropout student. A few weeks prior to the interview, Mr. and Mrs. Gold were in court initiating divorce proceedings after being separated for two years.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Mrs. Gold  Julie

This map represented the overinvolved relationship between Julie

and her mother with no separate parental or sibling subsystems.

3b. Hypothesized map of Gold family based on interview data.

Mr. Gold | Shirley ≡ Mrs. Gold ≡ Julie

This map showed Mr. Gold disengaged from the rest of the family. Also indicated were the overinvolved, enmeshed relationships between Mrs. Gold and the children, all in one subsystem.

4. Family's developmental stage. The family was in the middle marriage stage of development in terms of launching adolescents and the parents negotiating a new relationship. The decision to divorce at this point in their marriage suggested some major difficulties at this stage of development. Mr. and Mrs. Gold seemed to have chosen divorce as a means of redefining their relationship with each other. Also this fall, the family was confronted very directly with the aging of a member from the older generation with the death of Mrs. Gold's mother.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. The sources of support for the family have come directly from other family members, neighbors, and a psychologist who has treated Mrs. Gold and Julie individually.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. The sources of stress seem related to the developmental issues within the family. Within the past two years, all of the family members have had to deal with the stresses accompanied by members leaving the family through schooling, separation and divorce, and death.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as

well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? It was speculated that Julie's moving back home would only serve to prevent the relationship between Julie and her mother from changing. There was a strong, stable alliance between Julie and her mother which had impaired their ability to differentiate. It appeared that going home would help ensure that their relationship remain close at a time when Mrs. Gold was going through an emotional divorce as well as the recent death of her mother. As Julie's sister was attending college closer to home, Mrs. Gold began to visit Shirley more frequently; a phenomenon which Julie resented. Julie's overclose relationship with her mother was being threatened by these visits with her sister; therefore, it was speculated that returning home would be one way to preserve the family homeostasis.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Since very few restructuring moves were made during the interview, it would be speculative to report on the system's capacity for change. It appeared that although conscious efforts were being made to make changes in the family, the nature of the alliance between Julie and her mother was so longstanding and rigidly intense that the researcher was left feeling pessimistic about the family's ability to change.

Section IV - Gold Family

Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

2. Description of the family. Julie was an 18 year old, small, slightly overweight freshman at Springfield College who was planning to leave the school after the first semester. She was the youngest child and had one sister, Shirley age 20, who was a sophomore in college. Julie's mother had been a kindergarten teacher since 1970 and had a masters in Early Childhood Education. Julie's father and mother were separated for two years, and two weeks ago Julie's mother and father went to court to file for divorce.

This fall, Julie's maternal grandmother died and this was a hard time for the family. The maternal grandmother was described as a dynamic business woman who was involved in many things.

Julie and Shirley have had little contact with their father for the last two years. Julie stated that she hid in the bathroom when her father tried to talk to her in the courtroom two weeks ago.

Julie and her mother came to the session with a young married neighbor (a woman) that they have known for a couple of months. They seemed to have (especially the mother) shared a lot with her about their troubles.

For the last year, before Julie came to Springfield College, she and her mother were living together, and seeing the same therapist

weekly. Julie had medical problems including many headaches and an ulcer.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Mrs. Gold \equiv Julie

3b. Hypothesized map of Gold family based on interview data.

Mr. Gold | Sheila \rightarrow Mrs. Gold \equiv Julie

In this family, Julie and her mother seemed particularly enmeshed. Julie's father seemed somewhat disengaged, although that may be a part of the family's "game". The research assistant conjectured that Shirley had clearer boundaries and was able to leave the family more easily than Julie was at this point.

The enmeshment in this family was of a different style than that seen in other families. There was not a speaking for that was overt, as it is in many families, rather there seemed to be a pattern of parallel development, talking the same, acting the same, and the discussion merging from one of them to the other. (For instance, within seconds of each other, Julie said, "I want to be my own boss", and her mother stated, "I want to be my own boss too.")

Evidence for the overinvolvement of mother and Julie:

- A. Same therapist (but in separate, individual sessions).
- B. Mother and Julie both got sick when parents separated. Julie got an ulcer.
- C. Julie expected to have no contact with her father in the future. She described a cut off with him around fifth/sixth grade.

- D. Mother transferred schools a lot, described herself as indecisive. Julie described herself in the same type of terms.
- E. Mother was an intern in the kindergarten class Julie was in and she wanted to keep Julie in the class.
- F. They described themselves as being together all last year, and said they love each other too much and hang on each other too much.
- G. Julie understood mom better than Shirley.

Evidence of Shirley's more disengaged and less enmeshed relationship with the family:

- A. Both mother and Julie stated that Shirley had the power to suffocate them. Mother stated that Shirley could reduce her to tears.
- B. Shirley was not as upset by the divorce.
- C. Shirley was described as being more assertive, somewhat to the point of being callous, but that she got ahead. Mother stated, "Shirley doesn't empathize." Julie said, "Shirley doesn't understand the emotional aspects of things."
- D. Shirley wanted things her way.

4. Family's developmental stage. Two developmental stages were happening at the same time in this family, the courtship and middle marriage stages. Julie's mother was launching a new life and Julie was struggling to launch an independent life too. Both seemed to have fears about going out on their own and were clinging to each other and

the safety of the known elements of their relationship. Julie's mother was really on her own now with the filing for the divorce, the death of her mother, and the possibility of her ex-husband remarrying soon.

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

- A. Neighbors (family described them as support).
- B. Therapist - mother and daughter went weekly for two years.
- C. The nuclear family itself (two daughters and mother).

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

- A. Divorce.
- B. Settlement money for support.
- C. Death of grandmother.
- D. Illnesses.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? If Julie moved back home, she would restore the equilibrium to the pattern of Julie and the mother being the good ones in the family, not different like Shirley, or bad, like the father. It would help mother to not have to face as directly the break up of her marriage, and protect her as well from the reality of her mother's death.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Reasonably good. They seemed cognizant of their patterns, although they perhaps needed to be jolted out of some of their talking to action. Their insight did not appear to be facilitating change. The research assistant was concerned that the family would become too dependent on a therapist.


Section IV - Gold Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to the researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family. Unequivocally the dominant transactional structure of the interviewed members of this family appeared as:

Mrs. Gold  Julie

This map illustrated the overinvolved nature of the relationship between Mrs. Gold and her daughter. It also showed the peer quality of their relationship with no distinction between a parental subsystem and a sibling subsystem. Their strong, stable alliance was demonstrated repeatedly throughout the interview. The following transcript provided evidence of this configuration as well as information about Mr. Gold's relationship with the family.

Whiting: And you have been separated for a while.

Mother: Two years, uh huh.

Whiting: How's that been for the kids?
You said that, ah, you got an ulcer or

Julie: Ya, I almost had one the year I was in therapy. It was pretty crumby.

When the researcher met with Julie to talk about the project, she mentioned that she developed an ulcer when her parents separated two years ago. The researcher was interested in having the family talk about this period of time.

Whiting: O.K.

Julie: And ah, ya it was lousy, it was a hard two years.

Whiting: That you were in therapy on your own or with everyone or that was something that

Julie: Well my mother went and I went to the same guy.

Whiting: O.K.

Julie: And then I started group therapy.

Whiting: O.K. And it was really, the issue was in terms of your dad's leaving and

Julie: Ya and, you know, just the whole thing. There was a lot of emotional strain with the whole divorce and all that. (to her mother) Did you want to say something?

Mother: Um, no. I'm shaking my head, he was already gone. We started together and then he left. You're talking about the therapy?

Julie: You, you and dad were together. I wasn't with the three of you. Do you mean meeting as a family with the

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: With the therapist. Ya, we just went a few times together he and I, and it was recommended that we end it, but she went

Whiting: By the therapist?

Mother: Ya.

Whiting: Really?

The tone of Julie's question was as if she and her mother were peers; evidence of enmeshment.

Mother completed Julie's sentence; evidence of enmeshment.

Mother: Ya, it was like the eighth in a line of over twenty some odd years. It's all right, what, what, I'm, I'm trying to say is that the, the end result, the ulcer and the other thing was the end result of many years of difficulty. O.K.?

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: All right?

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And ah

Julie: Ah, ah

Mother: Ya, O.K. When you say it was a lousy two years, it was a lousy, you know, the whole thing but

Julie appeared to be attempting to answer for her mother. The boundaries seemed diffuse.

Julie: Ah

Mother: the difficult part was not, ah, the actual loss but, I, I think, ah, what transpired in the two years, the, ah, between the lawyers and the whole thing

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: made it really hard.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: That's what I was trying to tell you what, what should have been simple, ended up complicated and ended up, O.K.?

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I'm not disputing what she said, I'm just kind of qualifying it because, you know, like with the whole thing

Whiting: And it's

Mother: very unnecessary and took its toll on

Whiting: And

Mother: her and myself.

Whiting: O.K. How do you mean?

Mother: Well the emotional strain took its toll. I mean it should have ended sooner than it did. That's all.

Whiting: What you were qualifying was that what Julie was saying was the two years were kind of tough and

Mother: (Interrupting) Yes, they were.

Julie: Right.

Whiting: But realistically it was more than two years she

Mother: Yes, yes, she went through a great deal, that's what I'm trying to say.

Julie: Ya, I thought you were just talking about in terms of therapy.

Whiting: Right.

Mother: No, it's a long

Julie: Oh ya, and I, I misunderstood.

Mother: No, no for you, you went through a lot, and Shirley did too, but she handled it differently, and ah, you know. (pause)

Whiting: What was going on? What

Julie: Just a lot of fighting.

Whiting: O.K.

It was implied that the divorce had the same impact on mother and daughter; evidence of enmeshment.

Mother and Julie both used the same language as they described the divorce as an emotional strain; evidence of enmeshment.

The diffuse boundaries enabled family members to interrupt and intrude on each other's thoughts and conversations.

Beginning evidence of some perceived differences between Shirley and Julie.

Julie: And everything, you know, it was, it was constant, and you know, it started when I was very young. (laughs) So, well, it was even before I was born, but it was just, I was brought up with it, and, ah

Julie was able to speak with authority about parental issues; evidence of enmeshment.

Whiting: That was their, their struggles, their fighting or that was something that

Julie: (Interrupting) Well, it was a whole family thing, you know, my mother would, you know, defend my sister and I with my father, they would fight about us a lot, and um, and I am the type of person who kind of holds everything in, and it just came to a head, and I got very sick.

This was clear evidence of a mother-child coalition against the father. Julie's alliance with her mother appeared to have lengthy history.

Whiting: O.K.

Julie: Ya. Ya, I just, I never was really, I never really said very much about it or anything like that.

Whiting: It was all kind of bottled up and

Julie: Um um.

Whiting: and came out in an ulcer in a sense of a

Julie: Ya.

Whiting: kind of somatic pain and

Julie: Ya.

Whiting: how has that been? Is that pretty

Julie: It's pretty much gone away, I have been a lot healthier.

Whiting: Good.

Julie: In the past year I'd say.

Whiting: Good. You look good.

Julie: Thank you. (laughs) Well
I'm a lot better.

Whiting: Good.

Julie: I don't get sick anymore, I
don't get as many headaches as I
used to or anything like that.

Whiting: Well, that's good.

Julie: Ya, it is, it's a relief.

Whiting: Do you think that's a
feeling everybody has in terms of

Mother: Oh yes, we're all healthier,
once he left, it was better.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And if it had ended, it
would have been better. I think the
struggle kept this thing going emo-
tionally, you know. He was con-
testing, it was just a stupid thing,
but whatever, but physically once we
were on our own, we got through the
little things like what to do if the
water drips or whatever. Oh, emo-
tionally and physically we all, I was
very ill also, constantly with doctors
and my other daughter was constantly
sick, and he was very healthy looking.
Really very vital looking, and we were,
you know, (laughing, Julie smiles) all
dying. Ya, and once he left the whole
thing changed completely, really
changed, it's gotten better. Ya, you
have everyday struggles, but it is not
the same, it's like two mountains have
been lifted.

Whiting: Good.

Mother: Ya.

Everyone experienced
Mr. Gold's leaving in
the same way; evidence
of enmeshment.

Mrs. Gold's comments
provided more evidence
that the boundaries
between her and the
children were diffuse as
she and her daughters
were sick together and
that everyone got better
as soon as Mr. Gold left.

The use of the word "we"
suggested a skewed hier-
archy with mother and
children in the same
subsystem.

Whiting: What kind of contact do, do people expect to have with your dad?

Julie: None. That's it. He left, and, ah, some pretty lousy things happened, and he just, you know, I found out a lot of different things from my, my relatives that he had been doing, and it's like he, he could of cared whether, you know, my sister or I were dead or alive. He didn't make any effort in anything and then, I hadn't, hadn't spoken to him in almost a year, and when we were in court, he tried to come over and say hello. It was really dumb, (laughs) and cause he didn't pay any attention to us so, he didn't do it when he was there really. I think after I got into, ah, fifth or sixth grade was when my difficulty with, dealing with him personally started. I just had no relationship with him.

The use of the word "us" was further evidence of a coalition against Mr. Gold.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: Because I started to grow up.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: And I don't think he could, ah, he could deal with that cause, you know, I wasn't a baby any more so, there was really no communication when he was there.

Whiting: So for him to come to you when he was in court was like, wait a minute

Julie: (Laughs) I ran in the bathroom. (mother smiles) It was like he couldn't get us (all laugh), so I just took off for the ladies room, but I don't have anything to do with him and neither does my sister. (mother smiles)

Again the word "us" suggested a coalition against the father.

Whiting: Do you think that will probably be how it will be with you too?

Mother: Oh it definitely is. I have already had a name change, (mother and daughter laugh) and, ah, we're going to probate court. Oh ya, it's over.

All of the women in the family planned to relate to Mr. Gold in the same manner; further evidence of enmeshment and a stable alliance between mother and children.

END

The preceding transcript which occurred within the first five minutes of the interview provided important information about the transactional style of the family. Diagrammatically, the family appeared as:

mother : children } father
 .
 .

This structural map showed that the boundaries between the children and their mother were diffuse with the children in a stable coalition with their mother against their father. Based upon a structural model of this family, this parent-child coalition would help to explain Julie's ulcers (Minuchin et al., 1978).

The following seven transcripts provided further interactional evidence about the nature of the Gold family.

Whiting: When did you first find out that Julie wasn't really happy here?

Mother: When she told me the first week. (mother and daughter laugh) At first I thought it was the separation because we were alone all last year. Shirley left already, she was in (names town), so the two of us were going through that, and I thought that was part of it. That she didn't want to leave me and whatever. And then as the time progressed, apparently there wasn't enough to do here, she felt, and as she told me she didn't have the independence, she couldn't cross the campus with a security guard,

The enmeshed nature of Mrs. Gold's and Julie's relationship appeared as Mrs. Gold described how they were both alone the previous year and both dealing with Shirley's leaving for college. It was assumed that Mrs. Gold and Julie experienced life in the same manner.

without a security guard. Whatever was happening, and ah, see I said all right, but I wanted her to ah, I don't feel I should make her stay.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Some people would disagree with that, but I felt she should at least finish this semester. It's a matter of values, I can't make her become something she doesn't want to be, but I didn't want her to just walk off. And I figured if the semester ended in January, she was to stay until January, you know, whatever. And I wanted her to finish that, at least accomplish that. Which maybe it would have changed, but it didn't. And ah, well she said she was coming home, and I just told her I do want her to leave again, oh because we love one another too much. I, I am learning to be independent. I'm having a life of my own, she should have a life of her own. So, ah, initially she was going to try (college where her sister attends) in February, and chose not to, to come home and maybe work a semester or take courses, and I think that's really very wise. I think she should get out in the real world. No matter what she does, if it's waitressing, put her head together and then make some decision. As far as the college is concerned, the choice is hers. I would have liked to have her go to school in Boston. I'm a city person, I'm from (names city), but on the other hand it was a beautiful campus, and I went to (names college) which was a small school. I loved it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know sometimes the security of a small school is, is nice too, but you know, that's strictly, I feel, her choice. I'll, I'll support her in

Mrs. Gold's response to the researcher's preceding question again gave evidence to the enmeshed, overinvolved relationship she had with Julie. She spoke with conviction about what Julie should do as they both were going to become independent together; once again sharing the same experiences.

It was interesting to hear Mrs. Gold state that the decision to attend college was Julie's. However, later in the interview, Julie stated that she planned to transfer to a college in Boston which was where her mother wanted her to go.

whatever she does short of wasting a lot of money. I mean being honest about it. I didn't want her to transfer, and transfer, and transfer.

Whiting: Right.

Mother: That to me is a waste, so I think the second decision is better, to work a semester, and because we are not going to lose an awful lot financially, and she might earn a little something.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Put her head together, and then decide ah, and I agree with Julie, I think the whole thing with high school, the readiness, there really wasn't any direct choice on what she wanted to be, which is a hard decision.

Whiting: Sure it is.

Mother: But it is just as legitimate to know what you don't want.

Whiting: Yup.

Mother: See, and I feel if this is not what she wants, well then she knows that, so she has learned something.

Whiting: And I think most of us make those kind of decisions.

Mother: Right.

Whiting: Saying well, I know what I don't want and

Mother: Right, so there's really no, ah, it's not any big thing. Ah, as I said I transferred a lot and obviously I didn't do anything until I was, had two children and finally had some direction. So I can appreciate where she is coming from.

Again the commonality of experience between Mrs. Gold and Julie emerged offering more evidence of their enmeshed relationship.

Whiting: And I think you're saying too,
that this is an ongoing process any-
way, // in terms of saying

Mother: Oh sure, certainly. //

Whiting: hay, I'm feeling better and
different about myself than I was two
years ago, a year ago, // six months
ago.

Mother: Right, right. // I really
have no objection, my only concern is
that ah, you know, we love one another.
(laughs) I guess I just love her an
awful lot, and I'm so worried I'm going
to start hanging again, but ah, we've
talked about it so much that I think
it's almost going to kill each other
(mother and Julie laugh) to stay away
from one another. You know, because
it's a real thing when you live together
that's the only thing, and I see ah, you
know, I'm getting independent, and I see
the fact that she's been here she's a
lot more independent, ah, you know,
spunkier, ah

Julie: (Laughs)

Mother: That's good, it's good we have
to meet on another level. But I'd like
her to give college another try. I, we
did talk about it and, ah, I think at
least another year somewhere else and
then if she decides that school is not
for her, you know, this type of atmos-
phere, forget it and she'll have to
really either find a vocation of some
kind or whatever. But I feel she should
really give it another shot.

Although there is some
"insight" about the
need for a change in
the mother-daughter re-
lationship, the system
maintained itself as
Mrs. Gold remained over-
involved in Julie's
future plans.

END

Whiting: When you say you have talked
about the closeness of the relationship,
what's that look like? I mean, how does
that usually go? Is that

Mother: Fine, you know

Julie: I think we're both just worried that, you know, it's kind of hard, my mother and I are close, very close. And, ah, it was hard for me to come here, a lot harder than I thought leaving home just in general, and ah, I think we are afraid if I come back, and I leave again, it's going to be twice as hard. I may not leave because, you know, being at home is going to satisfy certain needs.

The diffuse boundaries enabled Julie to speak for her mother.

Again the use of "we" as Julie assumed that her mother would experience events the same way she did.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: Or something like that. But I am determined, and I mean (laughs) really determined to become independent. And, ah, I, I refuse to sit home at or any cost because I know it is going to happen if I sit home. I know what I'll turn into because I have been like that for the past few years, and it's really disgusting so (laughs) I'm just going to work very hard.

Whiting: Are there some ways your mother can help you with that?

Julie: Huh, just as long as we communicate I think. And tell each other how we are feeling, like if I feel that she's protecting me too much or if she feels that I'm getting in the way or something like that, or I'm protecting her too much, we just have to tell each other that no matter how much it hurts, because it is going to hurt even more if we don't.

The solution of talking to each other would seem to only serve to continue their enmeshed, peer relationship.

Whiting: Do you have some sense of how that works, of how you do that together, or how you protect each other?

Julie: (Laughs) (looking to mother)
You know, we just get mad. (laughs)

Mother: No. How we protect one another?
 Ah, by disclosing how we feel sometimes maybe too much, ah, I have a tendency to check up too much. I was just thinking as she was talking, I went out Saturday night for the first time, first date, with another couple, but she was out too, and around nine o'clock (laughs) I said gee I got to see if she's home and I, what is this, you know, she was in Springfield, to myself, I didn't say anything to anybody else, if she was in Springfield, I wouldn't know what she was doing, so I didn't do it, it's things like that, the first thing I could think of when she said I'm coming home. I don't want to cook, if I, you know, I don't want to do that, little things, so I told her. I don't have to answer to anybody anymore. All my life I have had to answer to someone, things like that. See I know I would start thinking, well I better let Julie know that I'm not coming home until nine o'clock. You know I'm not going to do it. If I say I'm going out, if I walk in at nine thirty, I want to walk in, and, she should be able, now that she's been away from me. They're like silly little things.

Julie: No, they're important.

Mother: But the independence to do that, you know. I'll see you later, or I'll be home around and that's it. And I would have the tendency to, you know, gosh it's nine thirty, or it's nine thirty and maybe I'd better tell her.

Whiting: Well it sounds like that isn't just something that rests in you, but that

Mother: // Ya well

Julie: I think // you're right, I think we

This sequence showed how Julie and her mother were really attempting to develop new ways of relating to one another.

Whiting: Julie could be the same way,
// it's nine thirty where's mommy?

Julie: Oh sure I believe it. // I
got home

Mother: and this is what //

Julie: and it's getting late, (mother
laughs) and I'm saying to myself here
she's only going to dinner, where did
she go, and that's like

Mother: (Laughing) Oh that was so
funny.

Julie: but, I didn't do anything.

Whiting: (Laughing) It's four o'clock
in the morning, where is this woman?

Julie: And I just decided I said, you
know, if I was at school, and besides
she's a grown woman, she's got more
ability,

Mother: See,

Julie: she's doing her thing.

Mother: See, the thing is if you do it
too much, it gets suffocating, and
these, these are the kinds of things
we had going. So I think we've talked
about it, my goodness and here's an
example just Saturday night we're both
trying to just knock it off.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know, and that was it. So
that's what I told myself if she was
in Springfield, I wouldn't know what
she was doing at nine o'clock at night,
she was out with a friend, so I didn't
do it but the impulse was there.

Whiting: Sure.

After talking about
changing the system, it
becomes quickly main-
tained as members in-
terrupted and spoke
simultaneously.

Their peer like quality
of their relationship
was demonstrated again.

Again efforts are being
made to change trans-
actional patterns.

Julie: Ya.

Mother: So I have to be like aware.
To let, we have to let each other
breathe, you know, that kind of a
thing.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: But other than that we get
along, I think, pretty well, you know,
it's just the mothering, she, she
mothers me, and I mother her, you
know, and, ah, we have discussed it
back and forth so much that goodness
if we really fall into the pattern
again, we've really had it.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: You know.

Julie: // I don't think we will
though.

Mother: I think that, ah // we are
both too concerned about it.

Julie: And, ah, like I said, I can't
even describe how here, how strongly,
you know, I just want to become inde-
pendent. I want to be my own boss.

Mother: And I want to be my own boss
too. You know, as I said I have never
been on my own, if I wasn't my mother's
daughter, I was my husband's wife, and
then my children's mother, and now it's
me, you know.

Whiting: And it's a whole new emergent
identity.

Mother: Ya, it's a, it's a whole new
thing, and I, ah, enjoy it.

Whiting: You like it.

Mother: Ya. (laughs, Julie smiles)

A nice description of the diffuse boundaries between the parental subsystem and the sibling subsystem were described. Mother and daughter related as peers in the same subsystem.

The system was maintained as Julie and her mother's plans were identical. They plan to experience events similarly.

Whiting: (Laughs)

Mother: Ya, I have a lot to learn, I have a lot of growing up to do, you know. I'm immature in a lot of ways. You know, but I don't want to give it up, it's like a whole, a whole thing, you know, and oh God, there's a whole world out there.

Mother seemed to be talking like a young adult as she was developmentally dealing with life at a stage similar to her daughter's.

Whiting: Good.

Mother: And I don't have to check in.

Julie: Ya, and I want to have that before I become a wife and a mother and all that stuff.

The content of the discussion sounded like differentiation but, interactionally, they remained overinvolved.

Mother: Ya, and she should.

Julie: You know, I don't want it to be that way because I feel it's important that I be me first.

Mother: And I agree with her, because I was very dependent.

END

Estelle: (Neighbor) Ya. Well I can relate to all this because I went and, ah, had to find my independence within a marriage, with a child.

Whiting: Ya.

Estelle: I did it backwards.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And I never had mine.

Estelle: (Laughs)

Mother: And I want her (Julie) to have hers, you know.

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: So here's three different,
and she (Estelle) has a very inde-
pendent little girl, it's beautiful.

Estelle: Cause I want her to be that
way because I wasn't brought up that
way.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Estelle: So I make sure. (laughs)

Julie: It's good that you have.

Mother: // You know, that's another

Julie: I would too. //

Mother: reason her choice of school
and courses

Julie: // Ya, see

Mother: when you're // (inaudible)

Julie: that's another thing that the
reason I came here. Did I interrupt
you?

Mother: No, no. I'm interrupting.
(everyone laughs)

Julie: My sister is a sophomore at
(names college) and I would have been
a freshman. And my sister is a doll,
I love her very much but, at times,
she can get on top of a person and
she doesn't want to get off. And ah,
I, when I told her I wasn't coming,
she made a big thing how she wanted
me to be there and everything, and I
was trying to tell her what would
happen and she still wanted me to
come and she just, I don't think she
fully understood.

First clue of any
conflict between Julie
and her sister.

Whiting: O.K.

Julie: And I feel if I go after just

testing this, you know, if I go to
(names sister's school) next year,
my sister will be a junior, I will
be a freshman and I will be twice as
independent as I am now.

Whiting: So you, it's the same kind
of sense of

Julie: See, I'll also

Whiting: You might lose something be-
cause the last time we talked the
plan was to go to (sister's college).

Julie: Right.

Whiting: And some of that even at the
time was a kind of, well I resent my
mother and Shirley being able to go
out to lunch:

Mother: Uh huh.

Julie: Ya.

Whiting: And be near her in (city) and
I want to be a part of that.

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: It sounds like folks all
trying to sort things out and

Mother: We do ah

Julie: Ya.

Whiting: find some of their own, own
kinds of

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: identities and places where
they can go on their own.

Julie: Uh huh.

Mother: And (city) would make it easier

When the researcher met
with Julie to talk
about the project, she
mentioned that she
planned to transfer to
the college where her
sister went because
Shirley and her mother
were seeing each other
more often.

if we want to get together, we do a lot of things together but not every weekend. You know, it's the availability. It's the idea you can get in for a birth date or if I,

Julie: Right:

Mother: I'm off the walls, I call up. You free? Let's go to lunch, and, you know, I can understand that

Julie: Ya.

Mother: but I don't see them every weekend and, ah, I think (city) would offer Julie the opportunity, even though Shirley is there in the vicinity whatever, to go out on her own.

Julie: Ya, exactly.

Mother: To take the T, to take the bus.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: A little more independence. Now someone said to me they thought she would get lost in (city). I don't think so. I think it would offer her a chance to really go out and explore on her own, on a Sunday if there's nobody around.

Julie: Um.

Mother: You know and while this is a lovely campus

Whiting: There's a lot more alternatives.

Mother: Yes, oh definitely.

Julie: And I am applying to (college) and (college). It's not just (college).

Mrs. Gold gave more evidence of the peer relationship she had with her children as she looked to them for support; again evidence for enmeshment.

All of the schools mentioned were in the same city close to home, therefore, enhancing her chances of being closer to home.

END

Julie: I'm going to take courses either at night or in the morning depending, she, I want, I want to get a job first, I want to get settled in a job. And I, I definitely want to take courses, there are certain things that I would like to take. I may even volunteer my time on Sundays to some group or something. I want to be busy. I want to be out of the house.

Whiting: I guess you do.

Julie: So

Whiting: What's all this sound like?

Mother: Sounds great, you know, if it comes about. I'm in favor of it. I think she should be active. I think, I think the kind of job at this point isn't important as long as she's out. Ah, she even mentioned, which I thought was very good, waitressing because it is a physical thing and she has a lot of inner tension. It would be a good way to get rid of it.

Because of the enmeshed nature of the relationship, Mrs. Gold was able to say what Julie was feeling.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know, ah, I think the idea of courses is a good idea, just to keep her hand in, then she can take what she likes. It doesn't, she's not pressured by a particular degree. We even talked of Blackstones. They offered a three month course in travel, being a travel agent and we have done a lot of traveling.

It was interesting to see how Mrs. Gold and Julie talked about their needs for independence, yet inter-actionally Mrs. Gold continued to be over-involved in Julie's future.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And it's got a lot of side, great side benefits and it's a short range goal and she did write. I said, you know, maybe you want to consider that as something in your hip pocket

for later.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Three months, it's a very short range thing and it's not, you know, four years or two years. So she wrote away for that and I think if, ah, when Julie gets determined, she does it. It's a question of having a sense of direction. As, as far as being her parent, I don't know what to tell her sometimes, I don't. I felt that values were imposed on me. I did things for other people, all right? And it really short changed me, even in terms of my education initially, and I'm reluctant to say do this, do that.

The nature of the relationship between Mrs. Gold and Julie had been one of peers for so long, she acknowledged how difficult it was for her to know how to guide and influence her daughter.

END

Mother: That worries me, I'm just afraid. I don't want her sitting home.

Julie: No, because I said that before.

Mother: It's a long day. I have to get up and go to work, and ah, I don't want that. I think she has to be occupied with

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: things that she feels are worthwhile.

Julie: And I think my short term college experience (laughs) has opened my eyes enough that when I go into another college as a freshman with all those other freshmen, I'm going to be one hundred per cent more realistic than they are. I found that I, I can't believe I mean everybody told me that I'm going to find

out all this stuff about college, and I'm saying no, no. It's like, I didn't understand what they were talking about.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: And I got here, and I (laughs) really didn't.

Mother: But it's not a loss really because first of all, you gained some independence.

Julie: Right.

Mother: Secondly, we got away from one another, third, whatever you learned here is in your head, you'll never lose it. So I mean really it's, ah,

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: and you also, which I think is still valuable, you've learned what you don't want.

Julie: Um.

Mother: So, you know, now you have to find a little more what you want. But ah, you know, it's not a total loss as far as I'm concerned, it's not a loss at all, because there's been some educational, ah, process going on, and so the experience is certainly with people.

Whiting: Sure.

Mother: In a different environment, it's just ah, and I think the choice that she's made, you know, she doesn't want to, is good, cause she told me she was afraid I'd make her stay the whole year, and I would never in a million years do that to anyone, that's like a prison sentence.

There was certainly no conflict about Julie's decision to leave and Mrs. Gold was able to speak with authority about Julie's experience.

Julie: Um um. (laughs)

Mother: I just felt that to walk off in the middle of a semester was not, not smart.

Julie: And I would do it.

Mother: (Interrupting) Not, not responsible, you know, you do it, you finish it out, finish the thing out, end it, and you know, walk away with a clean slate.

Whiting: How is your sister going to be with this

Mother: // Well Shirley did

Julie: (Laughs) She's just doing her thing. //

Mother: Well Shirley did tell me she thought you should come to (names Shirley's college) in February, and I told her that I can't tell you what to do.

Julie: Ya, she told me the same thing.

Mother: That's all, that's Shirley's problem.

Julie: Ya.

Mother: She's doing her thing.

Julie: She, she, she wanted me to come, ah, her friends wanted me to come and all this stuff. She thinks we'd have a real great time. Ah, unfortunately my sister doesn't understand the emotional aspect, I mean I think she does, but I don't think she accepts it because I tried to explain to her that, you know, I said Shirley, you know, if I stay with this, I may end up killing myself. Well think

Julie was asked a direct question and mother answered; evidence of enmeshment.

Julie and her mother describe what Shirley was doing in the same language, again evidence of their alliance.

about it (laughs) you know, O.K.

Mother: Shirley, Shirley just has a problem empathizing. That's, that's just her thing, I hope she learns to do it. She just bulls ahead, does her thing, and really and she just can not put herself, I know, as much as you can, it's really impossible, but she just doesn't understand anybody else's position. She sees it, strictly from her point of view. And that's a strength, but when it comes to relationships, it can

Mother and Julie agree about what Shirley is like.

Whiting: As far as understanding some things.

Mother: Ya. It's a weakness, you know.

Julie: // And she always

Mother: And I think // that's where I, it's at. It's not really that she doesn't care or she wants to, you know, envelop her, you know, it's just that she can't put herself in Julie's position, and, ah, she's just a different type all together. She's going to be Miss Merv Griffin, she's going to do her thing, and I believe it and, ah

The diffuse boundaries enabled Julie and her mother to speak simultaneously.

Julie: // She's going to get what she wants.

Mother: But Julie's a different // type of individual, and, ah, that's where the whole thing is, and that's why in a way it's probably better that she's not going there.

Julie: Ya.

Whiting: It sounds like

Julie: Ya, right now I couldn't deal with her.

Mother: Ya.

Julie: I think I could next year.

Mother: You know, you can kill somebody with love too, you know, kind of suffocate her.

Whiting: Yup.

Mother: And she needs, needs to be, to get on her own two feet, no question about it.

Whiting: It sounds like the relationship that you've got with the kids is different.

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: In terms of ah, ah, it sounds, my hunch would be that Julie has been more understanding to some of your dilemmas than

Mother: Ya, we're very much alike, and I went through a lot of what she's going through, as a youngster, but I had a very domineering mother.

According to mother and Julie, they seemed to experience life similarly; evidence of enmeshment.

END

Julie: Just getting back to what you said before a just as predicting and everything, I know in the past, ah, what happens to me when I feel that, ah, I'm getting the short end of the stick, and nine times out of ten I don't do anything about it. I just let it sit, and I bury it, and I got a lot of stuff buried, I know because I still think about it all the time, and ah, I'm just going to have to open my mouth.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: That's a big thing that I have

to do because I can't hack it anymore. I can't hack like when my, sometimes when my mother and sister get together, and I'm there, sometimes they don't get along and, (laughs) and that's a real trip and ah

Julie offered some more information about the relationship Shirley and her mother have.

Whiting: They don't get along.

Julie: Right. And if I told them to, if I, probably if I told you to stop it, maybe you would, I don't know. But I'm going to have to, I'm really going to have to open my mouth. That's something I'm going to have to do which I, I never really do.

Whiting: O.K.

Julie: When it's, when it's something that, you know, I go through this whole thing too, and maybe I'm being unreasonable and all that garbage, but um, I just decided to be unreasonable (laughs) as far as, as far as that's concerned because, ah, my mother wants her life, and I want my life, and unfortunately right now got to share the same quarters, while we're both trying to find our lives so

Mother: And actually with Shirley and I it's values, she tries, to do to me what she tries to do to her, and I don't want to be killed. (laughs) You know, I'll, I feel that when I hack it with her, I'm fighting for my emotional survival cause she'll reduce me to tears, you know, and I don't want this. And this is what she hears. We lock horns on values, my values are very much like hers, I'm not going to have her suffocate me. I've had it.

Mrs. Gold reported that she and Julie experience Shirley the same way. The alliance between Julie and her mother was very rigid and stable.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And that's kind, otherwise we get along, it's when it gets into values a little bit and empathy and other things, I'm

Whiting: Values of

Mother: You know, the way I want to do things, or ah, you know, that she should have a little more consideration, of

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: ah, she, ah, something to do with her (Julie's) birthday and Shirley wanted her (Julie) to open her present, and she (Julie) was tired and said, I'll do it tomorrow, and she (Shirley) kept insisting and insisting, and I turned to her (Shirley) and said, can't you hear this person, she is telling you she is tired, we'll do it tomorrow, and one thing led to another, and she felt I wanted to talk more to Julie. This is what I was trying to tell you, she doesn't, if I said to Shirley, please, my head is hurting me. Yes but, that's when we lock horns, you know.

Again the alliance between Julie and her mother was demonstrated. Mrs. Gold moved to protect Julie from her sister.

Julie: Ya.

Mother: What do I have to do, drop dead in front of you.

Julie: // And the thing is

Mother: That's where we, // otherwise we get along well, it's that thing that I, it really wipes me out, this whole thing about, someone's giving you a message, can't you hear it.

Whiting: Hear it. Ya.

Julie: Right.

Mother: O.K. That's when we have trouble, she and I. She (Julie) and I

don't because we tune into one another a little better.

Julie: Well,

Mother: That's the whole thing really.

Julie: in just taking that example, the thing that was definitely wrong about that was that I just sat there and let them fight. I should have said listen I don't want to open my present and that's it.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Julie: Because it was between Shirley and myself. My mother got upset and I should have said something and I didn't. And it was my fault because I sat there and got depressed because they were fighting and the fighting just didn't stop there. It went on to different things. My sister started accusing us of something that wasn't true.

Mother: (Laughs) (inaudible)

Julie: And it was all because I didn't open my present. And that's something I have to do.

Mother: It was an emotional thing.

END

Whiting: You have been very open and honest with me with the stuff that's been going on, and I, I think it has been a stressful year, stressful, not even a year since last September.

Julie: Horrible years, (laughs) // as far as I'm concerned.

Mother: She's done very well. // I think too, oh getting back to my mother, we were very close with her, and ah, she

More evidence of the allied relationship between Julie and her mother.

This sequence was interesting as Julie showed some awareness of what she might need to do to change transactions in the family.

It was important to hear that when Shirley confronted the alliance between Julie and her mother, it was denied.

was really almost like her father, and she came up, ah, she couldn't get away very often, she was in business, and she came up for Shirley's graduation. And all year Julie kept saying, and for my mother to leave it was like a miracle, you know, all the arrangements had to be made whatever. She came for two days. She kept saying she's not going to come, she's not going to come, and a month to the day, she went into the hospital.

Julie: Ya.

Mother: // And I think that

Julie: And I, I //

Mother: there is a feeling there, you know, it's always going to happen to me.

Julie: And

Mother: (Interrupting) If ever, it couldn't be helped, it was an unfortunate thing.

Julie: And on top of that my sister forgot my graduation, she forgot about it. (laughs)

Mother: So it kind of started in April, and it got worse too.

Julie: It does, // I have

Mother: My mother (inaudible) oh God //

Julie: I don't have much luck as far as school is concerned (laughs), whether I'm leaving or going in, that's it.

Mother: Well your luck is going to change.

Julie: Ya.

At the end of the interview with all the talk about change, the system was maintained as Julie and her mother spoke simultaneously, interrupted each other, and Mrs. Gold finished with a statement indicating enmeshment.

Mother: We'll make it change.

END

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Julie's withdrawal from college supported the system's homeostasis because it assisted the family in not changing. Although a need to change was verbalized frequently by both Mrs. Gold and Julie, her returning home seemed to have a homeostatic function. Mrs. Gold and Julie's interactional style was very limited to one characteristic of enmeshment as their strong, stable alliance was clearly demonstrated repeatedly throughout the interview.

With Julie living further away from home than her sister, Shirley, Mrs. Gold began to have more contact with Shirley. This seemed to threaten Julie's alliance with her mother so the short term goal was to return home until next fall when she could transfer to a college closer to home and her mother.

7. Capacity for restructuring. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

This last section concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed by the research assistant. Also to be included will be final comments on the Gold family.

Without question all of the structural assessments supported each other. They were consistent regarding the family's developmental stage and the current life context of the family. All of them addressed the recent transitional events of the family which included launching of adolescents, Mrs. Gold's mother's death, and the parents' divorce.

All of the assessments were consistent in their analysis of the boundaries of the family system. All of the structural maps showed Mrs. Gold and Julie being overinvolved and allied. The boundaries in this enmeshed family were such that there was no distinction between a parental subsystem and a sibling subsystem. Mr. Gold's disengaged relationship to the family was also noted in all of the assessments.

All of the structural assessments saw Julie's returning home as a homeostatic process which would aid in preventing the family from changing. At a time when Mrs. Gold and Julie were verbalizing a need to become more independent from each other, the limited transactional style of this family would become, more than likely, more rigidified with Julie's returning home.

The only area where there was a difference in the structural assessments was in speculation about the family's capacity for restructuring. The research assistant felt since Mrs. Gold and Julie

seemed cognizant of their patterns that the capacity for restructuring was reasonably good. The researcher felt, on the other hand, that although Mrs. Gold and Julie were consciously making some efforts to change, interactionally no changes were being made. The enmeshed quality of their relationship was demonstrated throughout the interview. In the opinion of this researcher, it appeared that something more than awareness was needed to restructure the strong, stable alliance between Mrs. Gold and her daughter.

In conclusion, the two members of the Gold family demonstrated repeatedly the enmeshed nature of this family system. Mrs. Gold's and Julie's alliance was rigid and appeared to have a lengthy history. The diffuse boundary between these two members had impaired their ability to lead autonomous lives. It was interesting to see how Mrs. Gold and Julie could maintain their closeness and loyalty to each other as they both attempted to become independent simultaneously. Because of this, what may appear to be different in the level of content was, in effect, only more of the same interactional style.

Regarding Julie's role as a possible conflict defuser in the family, it appeared that she was in a cross generational transactional pattern with her mother against her father. This pattern appeared to have a lengthy history as Julie mentioned that she did not have any relationship with her father for several years. There was also interactional evidence that this pattern was functioning with mother and Julie versus Shirley. It was important to hear in the interview that Shirley addressed the alliance between Julie and her mother and it was

denied by them. This interactional style of dealing with conflict was one which has been identified in enmeshed families. For Julie to be leaving college and returning home seemed only to maintain the rigid cross generational alliance with her mother.

Section V - Gray Family

Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On October 31, 1979, Don Gray went to the Dean of Students' Office to withdraw from the college. This researcher was contacted and saw Don that same day. A commuting student, Don said he was going home to tell his mother he had dropped out. He said he was willing to assist in the study. Since he had not spoken to his mother, he suggested that she call the researcher at home that evening. Mrs. Gray called and an interview was scheduled for November 2.

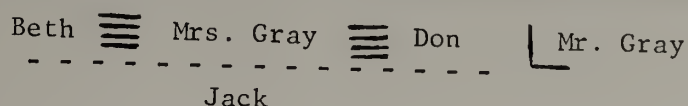
2. Description of the family. The Gray family consisted of Mrs. Gray, Don age 19, Beth age 17, and Jack age 14. Mrs. Gray was divorced four years ago after several years of separation. Mrs. Gray, who dropped out of high school in her senior year, was employed by the telephone company and worked split shifts. Don was working a full time night shift job in a half way house with delinquent youths as well as going to school full time. He was living at home and commuting to college as he lived in one of Springfield's neighboring communities. He graduated from high school in 1978 and worked for a year before beginning college this past September. Beth and Jack attended public schools.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Beth ≡ Mrs. Gray ≡ Don

The map indicated the overinvolved nature of the relationships among all of the interviewed members of the Gray family. It also showed a skewed family hierarchy with all members in the same subsystem.

3b. Hypothesized map of Gray family based on interview data.



Mr. Gray's relationship with the family was indicated by a rigid boundary. It was speculated that there were clearer boundaries between Jack and the subsystem of Beth, Mrs. Gray, and Don. Some interactional evidence was offered which suggested that Jack was not as entangled with members of the family.

4. Family's developmental stage. When asked about crises in the past year, Mrs. Gray maintained that the last several years had been difficult. The marriage appeared to have been highly conflicted for several years and, after the divorce four years ago, Mrs. Gray's mother, who was terminally ill with cancer, moved in with the family. Mrs. Gray cared for her until she died in their home. Because of difficulties Mrs. Gray was having managing Don and Beth, they both left home for a period of time. Don stayed with an aunt, who lived nearby, for approximately one year. Beth lived with her father for approximately three months, but returned home because of difficulties getting along with her stepmother. Within the past year, Mrs. Gray's father was placed in a nursing home.

There appeared to have been long standing financial concerns in

the family. Apparently, Mr. Gray was a gambler and money had been scarce. Mrs. Gray claimed that Don, a highly responsible person, had been working since he was fourteen and wondered if he had tried to take the place of an absent father. It appeared that the family had struggled financially for the last several years. If still married, the family would have been at the middle marriage stage as they had been confronted with the death of a member and the aging of and the placement of Mrs. Gray's father in a nursing home, as well as the launching of adolescents. Since Mrs. Gray and Mr. Gray had separated years ago, Mrs. Gray experienced the burdens of single parenthood.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. It seemed that the family struggled on its own. Support from Mrs. Gray's sister had been available, whereas the relationship with her brother was conflicted. The children seemed to rely on close friends and some rather unsuccessful attempts had been made to get help from agency clinics. The family gave the researcher evidence that everyone was in pain, but that members dealt with it on their own without much support.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. The family appeared to have been stressed and conflicted for years. It seemed to serve an important function in the family which will be presented in the following section.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Occasionally during the interview, members appeared as if they were not involved with each other, but verbal and non-verbal interactional evidence was demonstrated

which suggested they were overinvolved. Often, Beth was verbally uninvolved yet, non-verbally, she was watching her mother very attentively. All of the interviewed family members appeared pained and depressed, but it was speculated that this served the interactional purpose of keeping members together and overinvolved. There seemed to be a competitive spirit about who was the most stressed by having more difficulties. Don's attempt to work full time during the day appeared destined to fail as it was a very demanding schedule. His dropping out of college seemed to be a way of preventing change as it gave members a chance to focus on him and keep everyone overinvolved.

With Don's dropping out, members seemed to want to compete with him about who had the most problems. During the interview, the three family members cried. Beth maintained she was going through a lot, Don felt like a failure, and Mrs. Gray felt guilty for her troubled marriage and how it was the continuing cause of her children's difficulties.

Another speculation was that members sacrificed themselves in an attempt to defuse stress in other members. There was a history which suggested that Mrs. Gray was struggling after her divorce and the illness of her mother. It was during this time that both Beth and Don became difficult for Mrs. Gray to manage. One way to conceptualize Don's and Beth's behavior at this time, would be to suggest that they were attempting to have their mother worry about them and not about herself.

Analyzing Don's dropping out of college in the context of his

family system meant that this act was functioning to maintain the family system. Members could continue their pattern of escalating around one member's problems or they could have some relief from their own problems by focusing on Don. Whichever way this went, Don's dropping out helped prevent the system from changing.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Based on the interview, this writer assessed that though there was a long standing history of stress and conflict, it appeared functional and well calibrated. The researcher's recommendation that the family seek family therapy was rejected. As to be expected from a rigidly functioning organization, change was seen as highly threatening.

Section V - Gray Family

Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

2. Description of the family. Don, age 19, was the oldest of three sibs. His sister Beth, 17, was in high school and his brother Jack was 14. Don's parents had been separated for 12 years and got divorced about four years ago. The father remarried and lived somewhere in the area.

Don's mother had been working for the phone company for the last six years. Before that time, she was home with the children. She quit school in her senior year of high school.

Don worked for a year in a factory and at a rehabilitation center before he came to college. About three years ago, Don went to live with his mother's sister for a year because he and his mother were not getting along. During this same time, his sister, Beth, went to live with her father and stepmother for three months. Because she was fighting with her stepmother, Beth moved back home.

Jack was described as not being that bothered by much of anything, whereas both Beth and Don cried in the session, and appeared very sad and depressed. Don was working full time and going to school full time. He dropped out of school partway through the semester.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Beth ≡ Mrs. Gray ≡ Don

3b. Hypothesized map of Gray family based on interview data.

Not enough information was provided to speculate about the relationship of other family members.

This family seemed to have very diffuse boundaries in that emotions passed quickly from one person to the next. The whole family seemed to be depressed and overwhelmed by a series of incidents that happened in the last four years: parents' divorce (finally after a separation of 12 years), death of maternal grandmother, and maternal grandfather going into a nursing home. There is very little playfulness or humor in this family.

Evidence for the overinvolvement of family members:

- A. Feelings seemed to pass quickly from one family member to the next. Don started to cry, shortly after that Beth began to cry, then mother started to look depressed.
- B. When the researcher asked, "Who runs the ship?", Beth answered, "We all do", and mother agreed with her.
- C. There seemed to be a very weak sibling subsystem. Beth was consistently turned facing her mother throughout most of the session, and she and Don did not talk to each other directly during the hour, nor do they offer each other any solace when they were upset.
- D. Mom and Don were described by all family members in the session (Beth, mother, and Don) as being alike.

4. Family's developmental stage. The family was in the middle marriage stage of development. In the last few years, as mother needed

to be letting go of her children, other things were happening in her life that may have led the family to cling together in support of each other. It seemed difficult for mother to separate her anxieties from her children and they may have rallied around her with their own depressions to keep her from delving too deeply into her losses. This family seemed enmeshed, but with a lack of connection when it came to an ability to comfort each other.

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

- A. Friends.
- B. Family.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

- A. Four years ago, divorce and then Don's maternal grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and she lived with them until she died.
- B. A year ago, Don's maternal grandfather had to go into a nursing home.
- C. Financial stress.
- D. Father gambling.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? The family's preferred pattern of interaction probably protected all of them from falling into an abyss. As any one member felt upset, they could focus in on another member who was upset and avoid their own troubles. The family could also be colluding covertly to show dad how he messed them up.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Fairly good. The family seemed able to reach for help a little bit from outsiders, and they seemed to have some awareness that there were some things askew, rather than just pushing problems aside.



Section V - Gray Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to the researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family.

Beth  Mrs. Gray  Don

This map indicated the diffuse boundaries characteristic of the family. Members appeared enmeshed and overinvolved with one another. The map also showed the skewed nature of the hierarchy in the family as there was no boundary between the parental subsystem and the sibling subsystem. This interactional style was repeated throughout the interview. The following transcript offered the initial interactional data for this configuration.

Whiting: When did you first kind of
sense or feel that this maybe wasn't
the best decision or an O.K. decision
to be here?

Don: I think it's been coming like
maybe three weeks.

Whiting: O.K.

Don: It's that the work was getting
too behind me and there wasn't just
enough time to put one hundred percent
effort into it.

Whiting: Uh huh. The school work as

far as work and the job?

Don: Yes.

Whiting: Were you aware that, that ah, Don was having, I don't know, some mixed feelings or concerned feelings about being here.

Mother: Not as aware as I should have been in the beginning. Don kept telling me, you know, it's hard, ah, I, Don being a perfectionist I figured well, you know, he wasn't doing top grade work and I attributed it to that. That, you know, he wasn't up in the upper part of his class, but I didn't think he was having as much trouble as, as he was.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I think I (pause). Don and I have had problems so I kind of let this be Don's decision. You know more or less going to school, what he was doing. I was determined not to interfere in his life, let him stand on his own two feet.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And I didn't realize to what extent he was having, you know, this problem.

Whiting: O.K. Sounds like for a while then you've been trying to not interfere in some way or stay,

Mother: // Not interfere.

Whiting: keep your distance. //

Mother: Not get involved. I don't, what you want to call it but

Whiting: O.K.

Mrs. Gray offered some history to the nature of the relationship between herself and her son. The tone of her voice suggested that their struggles were characteristic of an overinvolved relationship; a combination of exasperation and affection.

Mother: I didn't realize, you know

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: how serious it was.

Whiting: O.K. How did that finally
go in terms of like

Mother: (Interrupting) Oh, I could
tell he was getting more edgy, and
we are and Don is a lot like myself,
unfortunately we rub each other the
wrong way (laughs) and this was hap-
pening more and more often and, ah,
he told me. Then I could see he was
upset, you know and ah, he came home
one day not too long ago, about a
week ago, and said that he tried to
quit (his job) that day. And that,
ah, the counselor talked him out of
it and said that, you know, he could
not hold down this full time job and
go to school full time. And I agreed
and I said well give it up, you know,
give up

Mother and son were
alike; evidence of
enmeshment.

Whiting: Give up the job.

Mother: the job.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Some way or other, we will,
you know. How was the is the thing

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: that, you know, I can't make
it financially without this job. And
I didn't have any answers for him
right then and there, but I thought
that eventually we could, you know,
find some answer that I would help
him financially as far as gas money
was concerned. This was, you know,
as much as I could do

Mrs. Gray had clearly
demonstrated her over-
involvement with Don
as she expanded from
the original question
regarding her knowledge
of Don's feelings about
being in college.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: do right now. I thought that he could get a student loan. He's been trying, you know, to pay it on his own. And I thought it was better that he was paying on it on his own as long as he was making the money.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Rather than get a loan.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: But I really thought that he would you know, might drop a course,

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: ah you know, try to graduate in five years instead of four years or

Whiting: Was this something that kind of the two of you sat down and talked about or it's like looking at

Mother: // We sat very, you know

Whiting: some other kind of alternatives. //

Mother: ah, communication isn't that easy between Don and I. I did say that I told him I would help him, you know.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And, ah, he said he was going to try. I thought he might consider giving up work but he kept saying no.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And then all of a sudden he just told me, you know, will you be upset if I quit school or angry with him. Not that I'm angry with him, I'm, you know, upset to think, if the reason is the job, that you know, he didn't quit the job

Again Mrs. Gray continued to expand and elaborate on the researcher's question. She gave more evidence that it was difficult for Don and her to complete transactions.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: and give school a try.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I'm a little worried.

Whiting: Uh huh. O.K. (pause) Um, are either of you surprised that this is happening? In the sense, that, ah, say to begin the fall and be working full time, and starting fresh in school, was there some sense that, ah, this was, you know, going to be pretty hard to do?

Don: I knew it was going to be hard, but I thought I could do it.

Whiting: Uh huh. (pause) So, so you are surprised that it has happened.

Don: More or less ya.

Whiting: Uh huh. How about you, Mrs. Gray?

Mother: I'm, I'm not sure. Um, I guess I shouldn't be surprised seeing that he was holding down that type of job and, you know, the type of person Don is that, you know, that was too much.

The enmeshed quality of the relationship was demonstrated as Mrs. Gray described what Don was like.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I should have realized that, but I think that I was trying to let go. This was my main concern was letting go and letting him become an adult in his own way.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Make his own mistakes and not get involved.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: So I think that was my main concern, I didn't see everything else.

Whiting: O.K. Beth, did, were you surprised to hear that Don was, you know, coming home or?

Beth: No way. Because well if, I knew he was having a hard time, he, cause I would hear him every day complaining about how hard it was, you know, for him to work and go to school and how tired he was, and he couldn't go to sleep because he had to study.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Beth: So, I didn't think he would because he's not the type of person who just, you know, lets go of something like that, but I knew he was having a hard time.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Up to this point, Beth had remained silent though clearly attentive as she was watching her mother very closely. The researcher addressed her to include her in the interview.

Beth indicated that she too was somewhat of an expert on Don's personality; evidence of the diffuse family boundaries.

END

Rather than take excerpts from the next section of the interview, the researcher decided to include the following lengthy transcript. This decision was made in an attempt not to disrupt the flow of what became an intense, emotional interview. The researcher was interested in observing the system before attempts were made at restructuring. The reader should pay particular attention to the difficulty members had completing transactions and speaking directly with one another.

Whiting: Would it help me to know, ah, what, what some of those struggles have been like? What kind of motivated you to say come on mom, just

slow down here a little bit, now,
keep your distance, let him find
some things out.

Mother: Well, you have to go back
quite a ways, um. I don't know maybe
I felt that, ah, my kids were too de-
pendent on me emotionally. And that
any time they had trouble, it was
very hard for me to cope with it,
emotionally, and though I might not
let them see how much it affected me,
I'm sure they know. I mean I may
have reacted in an angry way, but
inside it was more fear.

The enmeshed quality of
the family was demon-
strated as the behavior
of the children strongly
affected Mrs. Gray.
Stress seemed to flow
between members.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: That maybe I wasn't the right
kind of mother and look at now they
are having a hard time coping, you
know, becoming adults.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: But ah, at, at times I let
it, you know, take over my life where
I couldn't cope with my own life and
make my own decisions. So I kind of
pushed it, that I have to tell my-
self that now they are becoming
adults, whatever happens is, you
know, out of my hands really. I can
be there if they need me

The enmeshed quality of
the family was seen as
stress in one member
strongly affected other
members.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: but I can't stop them from
getting hurt.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I would like to protect them,
I feel they have been hurt because of
my mistakes. So I'm sure there is a
lot of guilt, you know, involved.

Whiting: O.K. I think we all need to
have ways we can blame things.

Mother: Um.

Whiting: It sounds like one way has been to blame yourself for some things but, like

Mother: (Interrupting) I kind of disassociate myself from everything like cause I can't, you know, reach a middle ground.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I'm trying (anxious laugh)

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: but I (anxious laugh), very hard.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: And also Don and I had a very hard time two or three years ago and he lived with my sister for a year. It seemed that every day, no matter what was happening, I don't know what exactly what the problem was, but we were at each other's throats, where to the point where I thought I couldn't control him.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I thought he had become my judge and jury. And I don't know how he felt about me, but it was bad, where I sort of told him to leave and he wanted to get out and I think it was the best thing, you know,

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: for him at the time to get away from me. And he did live with my sister.

It was clear that the family was struggling to change and develop new interactional rules.

Mother's historical review suggested it was difficult to resolve conflict.

A skewed family hierarchy is offered as mother felt judged by Don. His opinion strongly affected her.

Whiting: For a year?

Mother: For a year. It was very hard at first because I was angry at my sister for taking him. I felt that, you know, they, ah (pause), it was just a bad time for everybody.

Whiting: Uh huh. Are they, is she in (names city) too?

Mother: Yes.

Whiting: Has your husband, former husband, been involved in some of that, either in terms

Mother: No, no, // not much.

Whiting: of helping with // the kids or, no, I mean helping the kids or offering to take the kids? Is that, I'm must wondering if he is in the scene at all.

Mother: He hasn't been with Don at all. At first I think it was of Don's own choosing and later, you know, his choosing also.

Whiting: And that's been different for Beth?

Beth: I lived with my father for how long? (looks to mother)

Mother: Three months.

Beth: Ya, one, the time Don had lived with my aunt I'd also left, I, I went with my father.

Whiting: O.K. How about the young, your younger boy?

Mother: Jack. (everyone laughs)
Jack doesn't, you know, I'm sure a lot bothers him, but he doesn't you know, vocalize too much.

Up to this point in the interview, Don was sitting across from his mother with his head down. Beth was sitting next to her mother and when Beth was not looking down, she would be watching her mother very attentively. These body positions were maintained almost throughout the entire interview.

The overinvolved nature of the relationship between Mrs. Gray and Beth appeared as Beth deferred to her mother.

Whiting: I mean did he stay with you?

Mother: He stayed with me.

Whiting: O.K. How did people get back together? How, you know, like you were there for three months and Don you were there for a year or so.
(researcher slaps Don on the knee)

Mother: Maybe they were crazy (laughs) coming back, I don't know.

Whiting: Cause,

Mother: Or maybe I was crazy. I don't know. I don't know. I've always wanted them back.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: You know even though it was at the time unworkable between Don and I and I wanted Beth back, you know. I understood what she was going through, more I think than I could understand what was happening between Don and I.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Beth was kind of rebelling against me at my, you know, ah, rules and regulations. And she also wanted her father, which is normal.

Whiting: Uh huh. Was that, I mean did all of a sudden did people appear at your door? I guess

Mother: Oh no. I don't know they can tell you better than I can. (laughs)

Beth: Well I was having trouble, with, my father remarried,

Whiting: O.K.

Beth: so I was having trouble with his wife. You know, just little

The researcher felt like the family mood was slowly sinking so the researcher tried to liven up the family by slapping Don on the knee.

The topic was changed by Mrs. Gray and the researcher returned to the question of how the family was reunited.

arguments that just led up, one led to one big fight and she asked me to leave and I did.

Whiting: O.K. (pause) How about you?

Don: Well, I just guess after a year things cooled down a little

Whiting: Uh huh.

Don: and, ah, things got little better, I guess, so I decided to come home.

Whiting: Uh huh. Did things seem to work out better then too?

Don: Ya.

Whiting: Good. (pause)

Mother: Somewhat. (laughs) We still have our, you know, our personalities are still the same and I think when either one of us is under pressure, it's bad for the other.

Mrs. Gray continued to show the nature of this enmeshed relationship.

Whiting: Uh huh. Do you know what, what your mom's talking about here?

Don: Ya.

Whiting: O.K. What does she mean?

Don: You mean when we're under pressure?

The researcher took this opportunity to test what would happen when the system was challenged. Don was asked to address his mother.

Whiting: Well, like your personalities are the same, what's, what's that all about?

Don: I guess that, ah, we are kind of like each other in ways, (looks to mother, everyone laughs) then conflicts.

The overinvolved nature of the relationship appeared non-verbally.

Whiting: O.K. Do you know what ways you are alike or how that works? (pause)

Beth: They get upset by the
 littlest things. Well not really
 upset, but, and or they won't show
 it, but you can tell certain things
 bother them and just let it build
 up and then all at once.

Mother: Va voom. (mother and Beth
 laugh)

Beth: Ya.

Don: Both kind of perfectionists.

Mother: Um, unfortunately.

Don: I can't pin point anymore.

Whiting: That you both like things
 done in the right way or precise
 kinds of ways?

Mother: What we think is right.

Don: Ya.

Mother: Ah, it may not necessity
 be right, but

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I think actually we are, you
 know, harder with ourselves than,
 you know, I'm, it's hard for my kids
 to live with me, it's really. I
 don't know about Don, what it does
 to him, but I know what it does to
 me. (laughs) It's really hard to
 live up to those standards, so some-
 times it's easier not to even try.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: That's what I'm kind of afraid
 of, you know, with Don.

Whiting: As far as the standards that
 he

The diffuse boundaries
 enabled Beth to speak
 for her mother and
 brother, thereby main-
 taining the system's
 rule against direct
 dyadic communication.

Again Mrs. Gray assumed
 the responsibility for
 the family's difficulties
 as she maintained she's
 hard to live with.

Mother: Um.

Whiting: might be setting for himself or goals.

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: Do you know what your mom means?

Don: Ya. (long pause)

Whiting: How about in the last year have there been any other crises, events, death in the family, a loss of job, some things that have been

Mother: We had that before, ah, with my divorce, mother had cancer, she was with me and the children until the last day, and it was a very slow, torturing type of, ah, cancer. It was very hard for them. They had always lived downstairs or upstairs and, you know, all these things seemed to be, with the divorce it was, my mother getting sick and maybe six months later my, you know, arguing with the kids, Don taking off, Beth taking off, everything.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Those have been the big.

Whiting: O.K. And that's over the last four years.

Mother: Um, ya it's been almost three years with my mother (looks to Beth), was it three years?

Beth: (nods in agreement)

Whiting: Did you kids have the same kind of perception that those were struggling times for everybody?

Don: Um. (long pause)

Again the researcher asked Don and his mother to address each other. After a long silence, the researcher chose to ease the stress and changed the topic.

Mrs. Gray's response to the question revealed the amount of stress which the family had been confronted with in recent years.

It was speculated that the children were troublesome at a time when Mrs. Gray was very stressed. Their behavior may have been attempts to take her out of her own concerns.

The diffuse boundaries between Mrs. Gray and Beth emerged as Mrs. Gray deferred to her.

Whiting: Within the last year there really hasn't

Mother: Well my father has been put into a nursing home and that was pretty hard for me

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: and I, so imagine it affected the children and they have seen him there. They have seen, you know, parts of life that, you know, a lot of grown-ups haven't seen.

Whiting: Uh huh. Where do folks look for support when these things happen?

Mother: (Smiles) I guess with me my kids, I, I, not my kids, my friends, you know, few close friends. My family, yes and no, I have a sister and that, you know, I'm closer to than anybody else. That's the kind of support I can get.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I don't know where the kids get support. (looks to Beth)

Whiting: O.K.

Beth: Um, besides talking with my friends, my boyfriend. I just, most of the time kept it inside.

Whiting: Uh huh. (long pause) Don?

Don: Basically it's a few close friends and every once in a while I do talk with my mother.

Whiting: Uh huh. (pause)

Mother: Tell us any answers if you can come up with anything. (laughs)

Whiting: Well I tell you, when I asked

Additional stress for the family was revealed.

Mother assumed it was as difficult for her children as it was for her to place her father in the nursing home. This presumption suggested members were all alike, a characteristic of enmeshment.

Mrs. Gray reported few supports and shifted the focus to her children.

Members of the family again appeared to become depressed as they attempted to answer the question regarding sources of support.

that question it certainly seemed like that everybody kind of knew for each other what everybody does and that's hold things in a little bit or kind of go inward, I don't know that was just, ah

Mother: We don't hold things in.
(laughs) I mean, well yes we do, it comes out in the wrong way.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Naturally to the immediate family when it shouldn't be that way, these are the people I love the most, but and yet, I let the worse part of my personality be shown to them and not to others,

This sequence suggested the overinvolved relationship with combinations of affection and exasperation.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: you know, that I don't care about. (long pause) That's life I guess.

Whiting: What's it going to look like now in terms of you coming home, being at home? What kinds of expectations do you have?

Mother: I'm scared. (laughs) Because I don't know what to expect and I guess the same old baloney of feeling guilty. You know I wish I didn't, but and I, I think, ah, intellectually, I realize that it's ridiculous you know, I shouldn't be feeling guilty, but I do.

The question gets diverted as Mrs. Gray assumed the responsibility for the problems in the family.

Whiting: I'm not sure, guilty that this is happened or

The inability to complete transactions continued. Questions did not get answered in the family. It was difficult to bring closure to issues in this family.

Mother: I think I'm guilty, I felt guilty for marrying who I married, for living the way I did, for staying married for the length of time that I did, so the kids had to go through all the garbage that they went through.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And because they've had to feel the pinch financially even though I realize that, you know, they may be better off for feeling that pinch.

Whiting: Uh huh. Had to work hard and

Mother: Um.

Whiting: and place a value on things.

Mother: Right. But, I'm you know, I, I feel helpless.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I don't know how to help him, I want to help him, but I don't know what he really wants.

Whiting: Um.

Mother: If he doesn't want to go to school then fine, I'm happy for him. But if he wants to, you know, I feel very bad.

Whiting: O.K. Can you respond to your mom as far as she's saying she's a little frightened now, she's not sure what to expect. (pause) Does, ought she be feeling that way?

Don: I don't like for her to feel guilty that's not her fault that I'm not going to school.

Whiting: O.K. But what might she expect a week from now, two weeks from now? What's next month going to look like?

Don: I don't know.

Whiting: O.K. Right now it looks like you will be working, ah, and staying at that job.

Don was sitting with his head down while Beth would alternate between looking at the floor and her mother.

The researcher made an attempt to have Don speak directly to his mother and the attempt failed. Don also did not answer the question directly.

Don: Uh huh.

Whiting: O.K., and living at home.

Don: Uh huh.

Whiting: You mentioned rules before,
ah, what kinds of rules are there,
will there be? As a parent

Mother: I really don't have too,
you mean, oh well, the rules at that
time were with Beth

Again the question was
not answered.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: and she was a little bit
younger.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I don't really have too many
rules for Don. He's just that sort
of kid that, you know, a few rules
between ah, about the way we treat
each other.

The lack of rules for
Don was evidence of a
lack of hierarchy
between Don and his
mother.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: You know, that I feel I should
have and I don't have. With Beth, I
have some rules but she's very good at,
you know, following those so I don't
think, we've been over the bad part
about rules. You don't think so? You
don't think you follow them?

Beth: Oh I do.

Mother: Ya. Think I have too many?

Beth: (Softly) Sometimes. (is
visibly upset)

Mother: But with Don I really don't,
you know, he's a very responsible boy,
you know, young man, I don't have too
many.

The well calibrated na-
ture of Don and his
mother's struggles were
suggested by her saying
she was scared he was
coming home and then
saying he was a very
responsible young man.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I have certain rules about, you know, driving being, you know drinking and driving and, you know, stuff like that, but I really don't have to tell him what time to be home or,

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: or who to see, I don't.

Whiting: How about the rules around the way you treat each other? Sounds like that being in on time or cleaning his room or those things are, we've ironed those out, but the way we are with each other. (pause) How does that usually work? I don't even know what that's like.

Mother: I don't know. It's, ah, I feel that they should have, you know, like I should have, as a mother, certain rules.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: The kids like to fool around alot, you know, they, even the youngest one and, you know, one part of me wants to laugh and the other part, says well you know, I'm not their friend outdoors that they can, you know, be saying these things to me. I'm you know, I'm a parent.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: So I feel like I'm losing, I don't know if it's control, respect, or you know, what, but they seem to joke with me when I'm trying to be serious.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And I don't know if that's every parents', you know, problem or what.

Again the researcher was trying to have Mrs. Gray and Don speak directly to a specific issue and once again the system was maintained as direct communication was avoided and the topic eventually shifted dramatically.

Because the boundaries between the parental subsystem and the sibling subsystem were diffuse, Mrs. Gray felt powerless in her ability to influence or control her children. This was further evidence of the lack of a hierarchy.

END

In this next excerpt, the researcher attempted to have Mrs. Gray and Don speak directly to each other about their present concerns.

Mother: Well I don't know if Don just doesn't want to go to school or he does. I'm I'm really not sure about that.

Whiting: Uh huh. Why don't you find out.

Mother: That's what I'm trying to. (mother and Don laugh) At first he told me that he didn't like it this much and then when he said he made his decision, I asked him, you know, are you happy, happier with this decision. He said no. So I don't know, I'm a little confused.

Don: Well I wanted to go to school and I (inaudible) getting in and going to school, it's just that I got so far behind and everything that I couldn't take the pressure and I didn't like that.

Don spoke to the researcher and not to his mother.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Don: And so that led me to be unmotivated towards it. (pause)

Mother: Do you think it's because of the job? I mean if you weren't working, would you think you would have felt the same way?

Don: If I, ya, if I was doing all right, you know, I would want to continue, but there's no way I could get, um, decent grades.

Mother: Do you think you could get decent grades without the job?

Don: Ya, ya, you know, uh huh.

Mother: Then why don't you try?

Don: Because it's too late for this semester.

Mother: For this semester?

Don: Ya.

Mother: But not, I mean I don't know how it works. Do you? (to Whiting)

Whiting: Um. Keep going, the two of you are doing good.

Mother: Well do you know whether you can go on, you know, next semester start all over and just graduate later? I mean I know there are people who graduate in four and a half years, five years. You know, does there have to be a limit? Will they accept you next semester without the job? (pause) Do you know, Don?

Don: (Long pause) Ya, I could be accepted next semester, but I wouldn't want to.

Mother: How come?

Don: Cause I'd feel like a failure still you know. (begins to cry)

Mother: I would feel more like a failure if I didn't start and didn't try than, you're the only one that considers yourself a failure. I don't. I don't know about Beth. (long pause) Are you afraid that you might fail again if you try and not be able to do it?

Don: No.

Mother: I mean without school, I mean without work.

Don: Right now I can't do it without work, without working.

Mother: No, with working you said you

The system's tolerance for talking directly with members was low as Mrs. Gray looked to the researcher to get involved. The conversation was directed back to mother and son.

Perhaps Mrs. Gray realized that the researcher was not going to interfere with her talking to Don so she looked to Beth to be drawn into the conversation. Beth did not get involved as she was silent and Mrs. Gray continued.

couldn't do it. You can't do it without working, I'm not talking financially.

Don: I don't know.

Mother: Do you feel that, say you had, you applied for the student loans, and you worked maybe one or two days, you know, not night time but, ah, during the day, say the weekend. It still gave you the night time, you know, if you wanted to go out and do something. That would be enough money to keep you in spending money. I would give you money for your, ah, gas, so financially that would be taken care of. You know you have a roof over your head, you have food, you don't have to worry about that unless you wanted to live somewhere else. Do you feel you could do it then?

Don: Um.

Mother: Then why don't you try.

Don: Because I'd, I'd feel like a failure because I couldn't face coming back and starting over again.

Mother: You mean you couldn't face it with the kids?

Don: Everything.

Mother: Ya, but you wouldn't be the first one to do that Don. You've tried taking a full time job and going to school full time. I don't know too many people that can do it. So how can you possibly say, you know, you'd feel like a failure.

Don: Because I do.

Mother: Cause you weren't able to do the impossible you feel like a failure. Do you know anyone that, whose doing

Mrs. Gray appeared to be working hard to understand what was happening with her son. Don was sitting with his head down, moderately upset. Beth was watching her mother and occasionally would put her head down.

that and keeping up the grades? Not sleeping all night. (long pause) I don't think, that's why I don't know how to help you. In my eyes you would be quitting if you didn't try, if that's what you really want. (pause) You don't want to take money from me is that it?

Don: Uh huh.

Mother: I mean would you feel bad about taking money from me?

Don: A little.

Mother: Um?

Don: A little.

Mother: I wouldn't tell you that, that I could give you it if I didn't. I'm just telling you how much I can give you. (long pause) Do you really want to go to school? I mean do you really, you know, wish that you could?

Don: Uh huh.

Mother: Well, now you are going to feel like a failure whether you go or not. You feel bad about not going. I can't see why you can't try, see what that's like. (pause) Do you think it's got anything to do with living at home? You said something about wanting to get away, everything at home bothering you. (pause)

Mrs. Gray told Don how he felt and how he would feel; evidence of enmeshment.

Don: Well it's just that there's more pressure living home too.

Mother: Well maybe you look into living at school. (pause)

Don: (Inaudible)

Whiting: What kinds of pressures do you feel?

The researcher attempted to bring some clarity to the discussion.

Don: I don't know, it's just that I'm there and see all the problems that go on, and it kind of interferes.

Whiting: Uh huh. The problems with others, within the family. (pause)

Mother: Like what?

Don: I don't know.

Mother: Me and Beth.

Don: Everything.

Mother: Do you feel responsible? They're not your problems. Don, I just can't see if you really want to go to school, why you won't try, I mean there are a lot of things that we might try and you're giving up. This is what I'm afraid of, that you're going to be home miserable and it's going to start the same baloney between you and me. That I can't take. (long pause) Do you have any idea what you're going to do?

Don: No. (long pause)

Whiting: Would it be okay just to work? (pause)

Mother: It's okay with me, you know, if that's what Don would rather do.

Don: It's not really what I wanted to do.

Mother: What do you really want to do?

Don: I wanted to go to school and become something.

Mother: You don't think you can become anything without going to school? I mean do you have something specific in mind?

Don: No.

The vagueness of Don's answers appeared to be a way to keep his mother overinvolved with him. The more she pursued, the more he distanced; the more he distanced, the more she pursued.

Mrs. Gray again described how Don would feel.

Again the researcher was feeling the family was stuck and attempted to bring some clarity to the discussion.

Mrs. Gray's question seemed to have the effect of keeping the transaction incomplete at a time when they seemed to be reaching closure.

Whiting: You said, you said when Don said as far as things going on at home, you said you and Beth. Is that

Mother: We have our flair ups.
(laughs, Beth smiles) Maybe she, Beth can tell you better than I can.

Beth: No, you can.

Mother: No, but you know what bothers, what gets you into an argument with me and how you feel, I don't know how you feel.

Beth: Um.

Mother: We argue some.

Beth: What do we argue about?
(mother and Beth laugh)

Mother: Ah, about spending too much time over her boyfriend's, or about her maybe thinking that I expect her to do too much at home, you know, work, um. What else do we argue about?

Beth: I don't know.

Whiting: Has Don been in a position, growing up, to assume some responsibilities as an adult, um, either for the care of the other kids or

Mother: He's always had, ah, maybe, well he's always worked, since, he's been what fourteen? I felt that he was trying to take too much responsibility for me and for the house, you know. There was no help from my ex-husband and he kind of tried to make up, or I felt he was trying to make up for that. I think at the same time resenting, you know, he was doing it but resenting that he had so much responsibility.

It was interesting to hear Mrs. Gray say she didn't know how Beth felt after describing how Don felt.

The non-verbal behavior of members suggested that conflicts were functional and well calibrated.

Because of the nature and purpose of the interview was not intended to be therapeutic, the researcher felt a need to lower the stress in the system and not explore Mrs. Gray's and Beth's relationship any further, therefore the subject was changed.

Mrs. Gray demonstrated her ability to speak for how Don experienced his life; evidence of enmeshment.

END

The researcher left the interview room to get Don some paper towels as nobody in the room had any tissues. While he was gone, Beth expressed her desire to leave the interview. The following transcript took place when the researcher was out of the room and when he returned.

Beth: (Whispers, inaudible)

Mother: You want to go?

Beth: Yes.

Mother: Why?

Beth: I don't

Mother: (Inaudible)

Beth: Ya. (pause)

Mother: What's wrong, we're trying to get Don straightened out, what he's going to do.

Beth: I don't think it has much to do with me, ma. I don't want to stay here. I'm really upset, I can't

Mother: Why do you feel upset?

Whiting: (Returns to the room) Here you go big guy. It's not the softest stuff in town but

Mother: Beth feels that this here has nothing to do with her and she's upset and she wants to leave.

Whiting: Um.

Mother: It's all right with me.

Whiting: I'd hope you could hang in there with us because I, I think things do spill off onto other people, and I think right now we are looking for some ways, with the family here, where we are going to go.

The researcher was attempting to pick up the mood without realizing what had happened when he left.

Mrs. Gray spoke for Beth which again indicated her overinvolvement with Beth.

The researcher purposefully wanted Beth to stay as she appeared stressed and the researcher wanted members to leave the interview only after the stresses in the system were alleviated.

Beth: I think by having everything come out in the open that when I go home, I'm going to feel differently towards my mother and my brother, and I don't want to.

Mother: How are you going to feel differently? You are not going to like us or what?

Beth: I just think it's, I don't want to hear how you feel. I'd rather figure it out for myself that way, you know. (begins to cry)

Mother: Does it hurt you? Why? I don't understand? Does it hurt you that we feel bad? Is that it? Huh? Everybody feels badly // on occasion.

Beth: I know // ma, but I don't want to. I have too many things now I can't deal with. (crying) I can't take this.

Mother: I can understand you being upset over Don. My upset isn't that, something that I can't deal with, Beth. I've got to deal with // my

Beth: I can't handle // it, ma.

Mother: my being upset? (became teary)

Beth: // I can't, both of you,

Mother: (Inaudible) // for you.

Beth: both of it, I can't handle it.

Mother: O.K. I'm just telling you're not responsible for the way

Beth: // I know ma.

Mother: that I feel. //

Beth: Ma, I, it's too many things inside me now that I don't want to

Beth seemed to be responding to a threat that members would say things that would change how they saw each other. The system was maintained as members wouldn't address each other directly. Change seemed highly threatening.

The enmeshed quality of the family was demonstrated as members' emotions clearly affected one another.

think about anything else.

Mother: What's going on? (softly)
(pause) What do you have inside of
you? You don't want to say.

Whiting: Ya, I really don't think
it's, ah, at this point, the best
place to do something like that.

The researcher was
feeling a need to
alleviate the stress.

END

At this point, the researcher was concerned that the interview had been somewhat stressful for all of the members of the family and a decision was made to lower the stress. The researcher thanked everyone in the family for their willingness to show him what their family was like. They were told that some families had not been as cooperative and that it was impressive that they were willing to show me so much of themselves. This positive connotation did heighten the mood of everyone. After members gained their composure, a discussion about the possibilities of the family pursuing family therapy ensued. The following brief interaction occurred shortly after this discussion.

Whiting: Again, for me being a total
stranger, and you come in, and for
you folks to be as generous with
yourselves as you have been, I think
it would be helpful (to have family
therapy).

The researcher posi-
tively connoted the
family's emotional be-
havior as their way of
wanting to help the
researcher's project.

Mother: I, I, think it would, you
know, if we could all do it.

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: Ah, I don't feel like, ah, I
should force them. I couldn't anyway.

Whiting: Uh huh. Who runs the show?

(pause) (mother and Beth laugh, Don smiles)

Beth: // Everyone of us.

Mother: (Laughs) Yesterday, // what?

Beth: Everyone of us.

Mother: Um, true.

Once again the lack of a hierarchy in the family was demonstrated as Mrs. Gray agreed with Beth's statement that "everyone ran the show".

END

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? It appeared that Don's dropping out of college would assist in maintaining the basic interactional style of the family which was characterized by members being close to each other through problems and difficulties. Don's dropping out, which was seen by the family as problematic, served to perpetuate members' intense style of relating to each other which was characterized by a combination of affection and exasperation. With Don's dropping out, Mrs. Gray could continue to feel incompetent as a parent and blame herself for her children's difficulties. All interviewed members appeared to believe that their lives were destined to be full of turmoil and anguish. Whenever any member demonstrated competence,

this family myth was threatened. Don's dropping out seemed to perpetuate the idea that the children had been permanently damaged by what they were exposed to when their parents were married.

7. Capacity for restructuring. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

This last section concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed by the research assistant. Also to be included will be final comments on the Gray family.

Without question all of the structural assessments supported each other. They were consistent regarding the family's developmental stage and the current life context of the family. All of them addressed the stressful transitional events that had taken place in the family over the past several years. These included the conflicted marriage and subsequent divorce, the illness and death of Mrs. Gray's mother and the placement of Mrs. Gray's father in a nursing home in the past year.

All of the assessments were consistent in their analysis of the boundaries and the skewed nature of the hierarchy in the family. All of the structural maps indicated a family organization which included Don, Beth, and Mrs. Gray in the same subsystem. Also consistently indicated was the interactional style of the family members which was conceptualized as being enmeshed.

All of the structural assessments saw Don's dropping out of college as a homeostatic process which would aid in preventing change in the family. It was striking to see that, not only was Don's

dropping out conceptualized as a system maintaining phenomenon, but the researcher's assessments and the research assistant's assessment all speculated that the family's "problems", "pain", "depression", however it was described, was functional to the family system. The researcher speculated that the pain in all the family members served to keep members together and overinvolved with each other. The research assistant and the researcher speculated that the children were depressed so that Mrs. Gray could attempt to help them, thereby forgetting her own difficulties.

The only area where there was a difference in the structural assessments was in the speculation about the family's capacity for restructuring. The research assistant indicated that since the family "had some awareness that there were some things askew", the capacity for restructuring was fairly good. The researcher was pessimistic about the system's capacity for restructuring because the opportunity to seek family therapy was rejected and because attempts to mark boundaries in the session were quickly overruled. Don's dropping out served to perpetuate the intense, overinvolved, limited, interactional style of the family, which was maintained by all members.

In conclusion, the interviewed members of the Gray family demonstrated an enmeshed interactional style as members' emotions and behavior seemed to strongly affect other members. Also, there was an assumption in the family that members experienced events in similar ways. Dyadic communication between members was impaired as members had a difficult time speaking directly with each other and completing

topics. Members also seemed to be intensely involved with each other in a manner described as a combination of affection and exasperation.

Although there was no specific interactional evidence that Don was a conflict defuser in the family, it did appear that well calibrated conflicts were a functional consequence of the intense relationships between members. It did seem as if there was a competitive spirit among the interviewed members of the family as to who was the most stressed or pained. Clearly Mrs. Gray verbalized her anguish about her life, Don was upset about perceiving himself as a failure, and just when the researcher felt that the stress had been alleviated in the system, Beth reported that she was feeling overwhelmed. It was speculated by the researcher that the "baloney" between Mrs. Gray and Don would continue well into the future because it was simultaneously maintained by the system as well as a system maintenance interaction.



Section VI - Bender Family

Structural assessment #1. This was completed by the researcher immediately following the interview.

1. Establishing the interview. On November 12, 1979, the secretary in the Dean of Students' Office called to make an appointment for Scott Bender, a freshman who was planning to leave college when he completed the first semester. The researcher met with Scott the following day and described the research project. The researcher spoke with Mrs. Bender that evening and an appointment was scheduled for November 15.

2. Description of the family. The family consisted of Mrs. Bender and her four children, ages 24, 23, 18, and 16. Mr. Bender died in 1972 and Mrs. Bender had not remarried. Mrs. Bender worked part time and received social security benefits. Clay, the oldest son, returned with his wife and two children, to live downstairs in Mrs. Bender's home. He was discharged from the Army in the summer of 1979 after a four year enlistment. Mary, age 23, was currently working in a bank, after returning home this summer after spending two years in Colorado. Bryce, the youngest son, was in high school. The family lived thirty minutes from Springfield College. Mrs. Bender, Mary, and Scott were present at the interview.

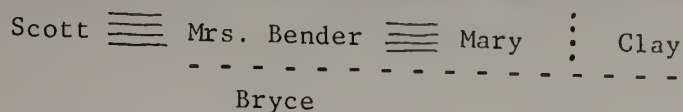
3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Mrs. Bender  Scott  Mary

This map showed the skewed hierarchy in the family with no boundaries between a parental subsystem and a sibling subsystem. It

also indicated the overinvolved relationship members had with each other.

3b. Hypothesized map of Bender family based on interview data.



This map suggested that several members of the family were over-involved with one another. The boundaries were diffuse and the family's hierarchy was skewed. It was speculated that there were clearer boundaries between Bryce and the rest of the family as he was seen as independent and mature.

4. Family's developmental stage. Although Mrs. Bender was a widow, the family was identified as being in the middle marriage stage of development since Mrs. Bender and all of the children, with the possible exception of Bryce, seemed to be dealing with transitional shifts related to independence and autonomy. The returning home of Clay, Mary and Scott suggested that the family was having some difficulty negotiating new interactional rules related to leaving home.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. Since the question was never directly asked, it was speculated that the family members tended to rely on each other for support. There also seemed to be a positive attitude about using outside resources as Mrs. Bender mentioned on several occasions that Scott should have talked to a counselor about his decision to leave college.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. Clearly, there had been stress for Mrs. Bender in her role as a single parent. She

stated that it was difficult trying to act as both a man and a woman for her children. Also, because she would lose her social security benefits if she worked full time, Mrs. Bender had not actively sought a full time career.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? It appeared that returning home helped maintain the system as it would mean that Mrs. Bender and Scott could continue to remain overinvolved. Returning home helped support the family myth that Scott was incompetent, immature, and overly dependent. Clearly this was how Mrs. Bender and Mary perceived Scott, and it was speculated that Clay and Bryce had the same perceptions.

The boundaries in the family were diffuse as members constantly interrupted each other, spoke simultaneously, and spoke for each other. Scott's returning home would assist in keeping the family members close together and support non differentiation from the family. It was reported that the family was very close and Mrs. Bender stated that Mary would always live around home.

7. Capacity for restructuring. The researcher challenged the family's skewed hierarchy on several occasions and watched the system swiftly maintain itself. Several attempts were made to have members complete transactions. The focus of this attempt centered on the specific topic of Mrs. Bender's expectations for Scott since he was returning home. On virtually every occasion the subject was changed, redirected, and subsequently lost. As a result, the researcher

believed that this lively and energetic family was limited in their transactional style. There were strong rules against change in this family.

Section VI - Bender Family

Structural assessment #2. This was completed by the research assistant after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Not applicable.

2. Description of the family. Scott, age 18, was a young man that decided that he wanted to drop out of Springfield College at the end of the first semester and return home to his family. Other members of his family included his mother, a vivacious woman in her mid-40's, his sister age 23, who just returned in July, 1979 to live at home again after living in Colorado for two and a half years, a younger brother, Bryce age 16, who was still in high school, and an older brother, Clay age 24, who just came back to the area in July also (from the service) and is married and has two children. Scott's father died in 1972 and Scott, Mrs. Bender, and Bryce received social security benefits. Scott's mother worked part time, if she worked full time, she would lose her social security benefits. Also, she stated that, "I like being home."

Scott and his mother and his sister, Mary, were the three that came to the session. Scott's sister, a high school graduate, recently got a new job as a bookkeeper in a bank, before that she worked at different jobs, and she stated that there wasn't really anything that she wanted to do. Her mother felt that the two and one half years in Colorado had set her daughter back, and that by going to Colorado, Mary moved too far away. The mother stated, if Mary doesn't live at home, "she will always live close by."

Scott was described by his mother as a "homebody". One of her explanations as to why he wanted to return home was that, "Scott realized he loves being home." The family on the whole had an energetic style, and they seemed very involved with one another. There was quite a bit of discussion of all the family members, even though only three of them came to the session.

3a. Structural map of interviewed members.

Scott ≡ Mrs. Bender ≡ Mary

3b. Hypothesized map of Bender family based on interview data.

Scott ≡ Mrs. Bender ≡ Mary
 - - - - -
 Bryce

People in this family frequently interrupted one another, spoke for one another, and talked about "him" or "her" when the person was sitting right there in the room (rather than speaking to the person directly). An interactional pattern that happened several times in the session was that the mother would say something about Scott, Scott would then try to speak up for his position, and immediately Mary would jump in, cut him off, and join with her mother around denigrating Scott. It's interesting how the family all recongregated in this area this summer, after two of the children had moved away.

One interaction that demonstrated some of the enmeshment in an interesting way occurred when Mrs. Bender said that she couldn't tell Scott to stay in school because then he would do it for the wrong reasons. With that type of statement, it is very difficult for Scott to take a stand on his own of what he would like to do.

Evidence of the overinvolvement of mother and Scott:

- A. Mary stated that Scott acted like he was the husband of his mother, and that his mother was supposed to be caring for him.
- B. Both Scott and his mother were described as people who love to be home.
- C. Scott's mother did most of his daily care-taking for him (picking up, washing clothes, cleaning, etc.)
- D. Scott was described by his sister and mom as being helpless, that he needed the care-taking that was given to him at home. ("He would freeze if there was no one there to get the furnace going").

Evidence of the overinvolvement of Mary and her mother:

- A. At 23, Mary recently moved back into the home.
- B. The move to Colorado was described as being too far by Mary's mother.
- C. Mother and Mary united in their descriptions of Scott as the wayward one. It seemed to give them something to talk about together almost as if they were talking about an errant husband.

4. Family's developmental stage. This family was in the middle marriage stage, but without a husband for the mother/wife to turn to, as she had less parenting responsibilities. Mrs. Bender did not have strong outside interests, or a career, to get involved in. Because of this she seemed as though she had turned to an early marriage stage with

Scott, where she was doing everything for him and taking care of him.

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

- A. SSI money.
- B. Family in the area.
- C. Scott - close friend that helped him get into Springfield College.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

- A. Death of father eight years ago.
- B. Clay was described as trying to juggle being a father, going to school, working one and a half jobs.
- C. Monetary concerns.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? Scott played an important role in this family. He helped his mother continue in her role as wife and mother, and enabled his sister to continue in her role as surrogate sister to the mother. This protected the whole family from having to shift to more independence, which was probably required upon the death of the father eight years ago. In many ways, it seemed as if they had not shifted to new patterns of interaction given his absence, but rather had incorporated some of those past interactional styles into their current functioning.

7. Capacity for restructuring. Fair. In the session, the researcher must have tried seven or eight times to challenge the system asking things like who is in charge here, or positively connoting how Scott helped the family out by giving them things to do. However, they

shut off his forays (especially the mother) and clung tightly to their definition of the problem, that Scott was the "bad guy" and there was nothing that they could do.

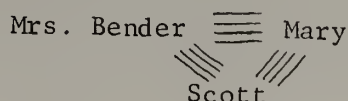
Section VI - Bender Family

Structural assessment #3. Completed by the researcher after viewing the videotape.

1. Establishing the interview. Refer to the researcher's initial assessment.

2. Description of the family. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

3. Structural map of the family.



This map indicated the diffuse boundaries and overinvolvement between members. Mrs. Bender and Mary were overinvolved in the executive subsystem and often related to Scott as if he were a young adolescent as opposed to a young adult. Scott maintained this interactional style by acting as a young adolescent. The reader should pay attention to the difficulty members had completing transactions. The following transcript provided the interactional evidence for the structural map.

Whiting: And my assumption is that when people, decision to go away to school effects everybody, and now the decision to come home has some effect on everybody and, hopefully, we can take a look at some of that tonight.

Mary: Ya, I wish we could. (laughs)

Mother: I don't know, I don't know.
In my opinion, I, this is just me now,

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: I think that he realized that he loves being home.

Scott: I like living away too, but you know, living home does have its advantages. (Scott looks to Mary and both laugh)

Whiting: Well how about, you seem kind of puzzled about, when did you first sense that, ah, Scott wasn't // happy here?

Mother: About // three weeks ago.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Not be, I wouldn't say, he's, he's not happy.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I don't know exactly what, how it all started it though.

Whiting: But somehow three weeks ago you sensed something was

Mother: Uh huh.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: That's when he started // talking about,

Mother: That's about //

Mary: you know, he was throwing things out every once in a while.

Mother: To all of us.

Mary: Ya.

Mother: Ya, to you too. When I wasn't around, (inaudible), Bryce.

Mrs. Bender offered an explanation for Scott's dropping out and he agreed indirectly. Scott and Mary's laughter suggested that their relationship may be close.

The researcher was speaking with Mrs. Bender and Mary intervened which suggested that the boundaries were diffuse. Immediately this speculation was further supported as Mrs. Bender intruded and spoke simultaneously with Mary.

Mary: Ya.

Scott: I, I like it here, like you know, I've got a lot of friends, I'm in intramural sports, that's something that I couldn't do,

Mary: // Do you think

Scott: I like //

Mary: you could like it a lot better if you got on the gym team?

Scott: Probably, but here they're so good. It's not like at, you know,

Mary: (Interrupting) Ya, but Scott, competition isn't everything. It's not everything, and if they took you for a year on the gym team, they have good coaches, they could make you better than what you were in // high school.

Scott: // Uh huh.

Mary: Then maybe you would feel, like you know, you were as good as some of them.

Mother: But I don't know, Mary, he, he, he's

Scott: Well.

Mother: saying he feels comfortable.

Scott: Mary, in high school, gymnastics was like a hobby to me. You know what I mean? And I, I guess I was pretty good at it. You know, I didn't have to put that much time into it. Here they put so much time into it. It's like a business, I've watched them.

Mary: But you loved it before.

Mary and Scott spoke simultaneously and Mary began to probe about Scott's decision to drop out. This suggested she was involved in the executive subsystem.

In a very brief period of time, the topic of conversation ranged from Mrs. Bender's reason for Scott's dropping out, to Scott's statement that he liked college, to Mary's questioning about gymnastics, to Mrs. Bender speaking for Scott as she said how he felt.

Mrs. Bender moved to support Scott as Mary probed.

Scott: I still like it. I go work out Monday and Friday nights in Judd Gym, you know.

Mary: You don't want to spend too much time on one thing? What is it?

Scott: Ugh! You got, you know, homework too, a lot of homework and

Mary: You don't think you could fit it all in?

Scott: I don't know.

Mary: You fit your weight lifting in, you spend a lot of time on that.

Scott: (Big sigh) Ya I know, ya, but Mary,

Mary: No, O.K., but

Scott: I can't see doing something if I'm not going to get anywhere at it, you know what I mean? // And I don't,

Mary: What do you // mean?

Scott: I don't want to go on the gymnastic team and, you know, be the (laughs) bottom of the pair. You know what I mean? I don't want to like be on the taxi squad. // You know like

Mother: No // you weren't exactly a star at (hometown) either.

Scott: Ya, I know.

Mother: But yet you loved your team.

Scott: Ya.

Mary: Ya, but what I want to know is if you, if you did get on the gym team, and you belonged to the gym

Mary seemed to be parenting Scott.

Mary spoke with assumed expertise about Scott's life which was evidence of their overinvolved relationship.

The boundaries were diffuse as members spoke simultaneously and intruded into each other's conversations. Again this suggested enmeshment.

Mrs. Bender's alliance shifted as she joined Mary in the attack of Scott. This pattern of shifting alliance became clearer as the interview progressed.

team and you started feeling good about that, would you like staying here a lot better?

Scott: Of course you would, ya.

Mary: Would // you want to stay here like that?

Scott: Camaraderie and everything like that, sure // but I don't want to go on gymnastics here. (Scott and Mary laugh) (to Mary) What's so funny? (Scott looked at his mother) I just don't want to go on gymnastics.

Mother: (Laughs) I was looking at her, (person videotaping could be seen) I feel like I'm on Candid Camera. (everyone laughs) Oh God!

Dramatic topic switch.

Whiting: O.K. So a few weeks ago, three weeks ago, you // sensed

The researcher attempted to readdress his original question and Mrs. Bender intruded.

Mother: About // three weeks ago.

Whiting: that something wasn't right, O.K.? Um, did you talk at that time together about that? How did that go?

The researcher attempted to discover how Mrs. Bender and Scott talked with each other.

Scott: I told her I wanted to transfer.

Whiting: O.K.

Scott: She was kind of shocked at first. (long pause) (looks to mother)

Mother: (Shakes head no) I don't get it, it's only been two or three months.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And you loved it so much, no, at first. I don't know how it happened. How, how are you with Brad in your room?

The topic was changed and the question was lost.

Scott: It's O.K.

Mother: Is that O.K.? Are, are you sure you are telling me // everything?

Scott: Ma, // I am. No problem.

Mother: Is Brad comfortable with you too?

Scott: I guess so.

Mother: Does he ever tell you anything about your lifting weights and he's not? How you clutter // up the room?

Scott: Well, he // doesn't like it too much the way, you know, the sweat (Mary and Scott laugh) but

Mother: In other words, you // smell.

Mary: // Stink.

Scott: Other than that, no.

Mother: We go up into his room, and we just about die. (everyone laughs)

Whiting: Really.

Scott: You go down the weight room and there are all these big football players down there, you can't even touch the stuff, you know.

Mother: Ya.

Scott: So I lift in my, my room.

Mother: But you don't think that's the problem?

Scott: I don't think so. (pause)

Whiting: Is there anything that you could pinpoint that would seem to help your mother understand kind of what's happening or?

Mrs. Bender intruded with impunity into Scott's personal life, evidence of enmeshment.

Mary joined mother to attack Scott.

What began as some concerns about Scott and his roommate got defused with Mrs. Bender's humor. The family was demonstrating their inability to complete transactions which was evidence of enmeshment.

It was beginning to appear that dyadic communication between members was difficult to complete so the researcher attempted to have Scott clarify his reasons for dropping out.

Scott: Ah, ya, I don't want to stay in phys ed anymore. I'm not sure what I want to major in, so that's why I'm leaving. That will sum it up, doesn't it? (laughs)

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I don't think that's why so, because there are counselors here. You never gave them a chance.

Scott: What, what can they tell me though, I mean how, how can they tell me what I want to go into? They can't do that! It's the person that decides, they can

Mother: (Interrupting) Not necessarily.

Scott: And I figured if you don't know what you want, people at (names community college) told me, if you don't know what you want to go into, study our liberal arts program. You were there. I mean I'm not going to study liberal arts here for five thousand dollars.

Mother: That's it, I, I, I agree with you, but the thing that shocks me is how could you change your mind so suddenly in two and a half months. (pause)

Scott: (Anxious laugh)

Mary: // (Inaudible)

Mother: You said you // wanted to work with kids, you wanted to be a gym

Scott: (Interrupting) Well I enjoy // it during the summer.

Mother: You, you love kids //

Scott: like that, but

Since Mrs. Bender assumed expertise on Scott's life, she refuted his view of himself.

Scott spoke fairly clearly about his reasons for leaving but since bringing closure to an issue seemed to be intolerable to the family system, Mrs. Bender challenged Scott.

This enmeshed system clearly showed itself as everyone began speaking simultaneously and Mrs. Bender spoke with assumed expertise about Scott's interests.

Mary: Ya!

Scott: Ya. I still do. So I don't want to go into phys ed, I don't know why, I just

Mary: (Interrupting) What, did your interest drop // that fast?

Mother: What // ya! What made you change

Mary: Why? //

Mother: your mind?

Mary: When did it start happening? Why has it been happening? I mean you've loved this all your life.

Mother: You're that kind of a person anyhow!

Scott: // Well

Mother: I can't // picture you being in business or anything like that, sitting behind a desk!

Scott: (Sighs)

Mother: You're too much of a jock for that!

Scott: Ya.

Mary: (Laughs quietly) (pause)

Scott: I don't know, I just, I started having doubts about, you know

Mary: (Interrupting) Has someone been talking to you? Someone, is there someone bending your ear about things? That's what I think too and Harry (a recent alumnus who helped influence Scott's decision to come to Springfield) thinks so too.

The alliance system of mother and Mary appeared as the diffuse boundaries enabled Mary to join in the attack.

The diffuse boundaries were further demonstrated as Mary and her mother both spoke with assumed expertise about Scott.

Scott began to further explain himself and the system quickly maintained itself as Mary interrupted Scott and the inquiry continued.

Mother: Yes and he // admitted
to me

Scott: Everyone talks //

Mother: one, one evening when we were
alone, you told me that there were
several people that are at this
college that are going to be leaving
next year.

Scott: Oh, after this year, ya, but

Mother: That they changed their minds
too. Now what exactly did you people
talk about together?

Scott: Nothing. Like some of the
guys say, you know, they don't, they
don't like it here. I don't know why?
They just don't like it here. Some,
some of them say it's too jocked out,
there's too many jocks and they don't
like it. They're just not that type.
But they're going to stay. Like
there's a kid, he's in health, right,
he's gonna stay in that and, but he's
going to go to a different college
like (names college) you know. I
don't know. You know what I'm saying?

Mother: I hope they haven't influenced
you,

Scott: Uh uh.

Mother: because it's so nice here, I
mean.

Whiting: You, you mentioned just in
terms of home that Scott seems to like
being home, um, do you know what your
mom means by that?

Scott: Ya, I know what she means by
that. Like it's more comfortable, to
eat when you want, you know

Mary: (Interrupting) He's got a

The diffuse boundaries
again enabled Mrs.
Bender to intrude into
Scott's personal life.

Mrs. Bender's comment
suggested that she
questioned Scott's
ability to think for
himself.

The researcher attempted
to explore Scott's un-
derstanding of his
mother's earlier state-
ment.

great big color T.V., he can stretch out and watch his football games, eat when he wants.

Scott: (Interrupting) The only thing I can't get at home that I can get here is like friends. I've made a lot of friends, and that's the only thing, that's really the only thing I'll miss, you know, and sports and stuff like that. // For the

Mother: That's important // too.

Scott: And it's so much easier to study at home, I found it that way, like in high school. Just go close the door. // You

Mother: You don't // have any (inaudible) so

Scott: Your, your roommate wants to play the stereo or the other guys down the hall blasting their stereo. I've, I've gone up to the library, but I just don't feel comfortable up there. I like being in a nice quiet room and studying.

Mother: Scott is a homebody, he's always been

Scott: (Deep sigh)

Mother: That's, ah, something too that's got to, might be worth considering.

Whiting: O.K. Ah, how do you mean?

Mother: He's ah, he's a person who loves to be home if he, all right, you know, like some young men his age, you know, seventeen and eighteen, he would go out with them, but not that often.

Whiting: Uh huh.

The diffuse boundaries enabled Mary to interrupt and answer for Scott.

Scott defined himself as a young adolescent and unable to make the transition away from home.

What began as a question directed to Scott was elaborated on by Mrs. Bender as she demonstrated her overinvolvement and expertise with her son. The family demonstrated its enmeshed interactional style.

Mother: Not at all, he would rather stay home and stretch out on the couch.

END

This first transcript demonstrated very clearly the enmeshed interactional patterns in the family. Members intruded, spoke for each other, and Mrs. Bender and Mary assumed expertise on Scott's life. The pattern of shifting alliances would show itself again in the following transcript.

Mother: If you spoke with a counselor, you might change your major. I think it would do you good. I think you should get away from me.

Scott: Um. (pause) I was thinking maybe there's, I don't know if I should say this, but how come you guys don't want me to come back? Are you afraid I'm going to eat too much food or

Mary: No!

Scott: or take up too much room?
What were you talking about on the phone the other night?

Mary: Ah, ah, ah, when? (laughs)
Wha, wha, when?

Mother: All the goodies that were //
gone

Mary: Oh //

Mother: from the freezer.

Mary: Ya.

Mother: Nobody touched them, but
Scott had to. (mother and Mary laugh)

The following sequence again offered interactional evidence for the enmeshed transactional style of the family. Transactions between members did not get completed and Scott's attempt to understand the united resistance to his returning home was never resolved.

No, Scott, I think it's, it's, it would be best if you, ah, stay, stayed on the // campus.

Mary: It's // it's not cause you eat too much or anything like that, but you're so helpless. You've got to be away, you've got to learn how to // stay

Mary interrupted and joined in to attack Scott and the system was maintained.

Scott: I took // care of myself O.K. here.

Mary: Ya but,

Scott: No problem.

Mary: You got, oh Scott,

Mother: // Ya, but when your home,

Mary: you rely too much on her // (laughs)

Mother: how come you rely on us?

Scott: Cause it's easier. (laughs)
I know that's stupid, but

Scott provided opportunities to be infantilized.

Mother: Gees! I don't think that that's going to help you, that's an education in of itself, that you're receiving right here, just by being away from home. (pause) (Scott sighs)
That's important, you know.

Mary: // Ya.

Scott: Uh huh. //

Mary: You learn a lot by that, just being away, a lot more than you would be at home. You'd probably even come to a quicker decision about what you want to do.

Scott: Is what you're saying is that I should stay here just to get the experience.

Mary: No.

Mother: // No.

Mary: No. // No.

Scott: That's just about what you
are saying.

Mary: Uh uh. That's not what I,
not why I want you to stay here. I
think, I think you are really wasting
your brain by going to (names commu-
nity college).

Mother: // Oh Mary.

Mary: They'd // accept me or
Clay. Well listen

Scott: // It's a good school.

Mother: It's a good school. //

Mary: They'd accept me and Clay.

Scott: Oh well.

Mary: And look at us.

Scott: // Mary, I was

Mary: You know //

Scott: talking to this lady there

Mother: (Inaudible)

Scott: and they // take people
and sent them on to (names college).

Mary: (To mother) I'm talking
about when // we got out of school
and everything and the marks we had
in school.

Scott: They send people from there
on to (names same college). You know
schools like that.

The family demonstrated
its shifting alliance
system as mother joined
to defend Scott when
Mary attacked.

The researcher was
struck by how quickly
topics were changed as
a way to leave trans-
actions incomplete.
Again this transactional
style was characteristic
of enmeshment.

Mother: That's a good school. (referring to community college)

Scott: Ya.

Mary: I'm just // saying

Scott: It'll // be just as challenging as it is here. I think so.

Mary: Ya, but will you be able to get a better job once you // graduate?

Mother: But // you, you probably, you probably will be getting out of your field.

Scott: What do you mean?

Mother: Anything to do with health.

Mary: Ya, but // he's

Mother: (Inaudible)

Mary: That's his whole point, ma. He doesn't know what he wants to do.

Scott: If ever, if I ever do want to come back here, I was talking to the assistant dean and he said I could come back, no problem.

Mother's ability to swiftly shift alliances was further evidence of the enmeshed nature of this family.

The family's shifting alliance system was demonstrated as Mary allied with Scott and defended him.

END

Without question, the family was demonstrating its preference for transactional patterns characteristic of enmeshment. The inability to complete transactions, members intruding with impunity, and the shifting alliances were demonstrated throughout the interview. Another structural map is offered as the boundaries in the family indicated a skewed hierarchy.

Scott Mrs. Bender Mary

Scott was placed in the same hierarchical level with his mother and Mary because there was little interactional evidence which suggested clarity about parental authority or guidance. The following transcripts provided the interactional data for this configuration.

Whiting: I was wondering whether
there's been a plot for Scott to
become more cosmopolitan (Mary
laughs) or become more outgoing
or more, um

Mother: On his own.

Whiting: Ya.

Mary: I don't think it was so much
a plot

Whiting: Maybe not a plot, I mean

Mary: I mean

Whiting: But I mean there seems like
there is a lot of energy around,
come on Scott you got to

Mary: // Ya.

Mother: Get going. //

Mary: That's because

Mother: Well that's because you
don't know him, really.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: He's the only one out of
// all of us,

Mother: He is so unique //

Mary: out of our family

The enmeshed style of the family readily appeared as Mary and Mrs. Bender spoke simultaneously and with assumed expertise about Scott.

Mother: in our family (mother and Mary laugh)

Whiting: O.K. How do you mean?

Mary: Well we are all so, we're ready to go out and, you know, pretty much be independent, you know, and he's the only one out of all of us, even out of Bryce, the youngest. He's the only one that looks like he's going to stay home for the rest of his life.

Mary and Mrs. Bender were united in their attack.

Scott: How can you say that // though?

Mary: Relying on, //

Scott: I don't see how you can say that.

Mary: you know on the

Scott: How can you say that? Why?

Mary: // You just seem,

Scott: What makes you //

Mary: you seem that way.

Scott: I seem that way, what?

Mary: Because, if you, if you want breakfast in the morning, you would more, you would just as soon ask mom for a great big breakfast and if she doesn't cook it for you, you won't go and cook it!

Scott: When you've got // somebody at your disposal,

Mary: You'd settle // for nothing.

Scott: // take advantage of it, right?

The system showed itself as the diffuse boundaries enabled members to speak simultaneously. Mary again was showing her overinvolvement with Scott as she spoke with authority about how he behaved.

Mary: You'd settle for nothing. //
 No, I mean, you know, you don't ever
 try to do anything for yourself be-
 cause you have her right there to do
 everything for you.

Scott: Um.

Mary: So you don't even try!

Scott: The thing is I'm quite capable
 of it. I always make myself breakfast
 when she's not there.

Mary: Cereal!

Scott: What's (Mary laughs) eggs
 (inaudible)

Mother: How about the day I went to a
 wedding and I had everything all layed
 out for you and your brother.

The alliance of Mrs.
 Bender and Mary appeared
 as she supported Mary's
 attack on Scott.

Scott: Ya.

Mother: He did everything for himself.
 What did you eat? Five bowls of
 cereal all day.

Scott: O.K. (he and Mary laugh)

Mother: Because it was easier, brother
 says I'm not cooking for him.

Scott: Um.

Mother: Well, and so he begged him and
 says will you make my hamburger.
 (Scott sighs, Mary laughs) And he
 says no, not unless you pay me a
 dollar. And so he said the heck with
 it, I'll eat cereal. (smiling) You
 know, you have to know Scott. (sighs)

The overinvolved rela-
 tionship Mrs. Bender and
 Mary had with Scott ap-
 peared to vacillate
 between affection and
 exasperation as they
 criticized him and
 laughed about his
 behavior.

Whiting: O.K. You're leaving here oh,
 ah, (to mother) what do you expect of
 him? What's it look like now? You're
 talking about transferring to (commu-
 nity college)

Scott: Uh huh.

Whiting: um, and living at home. Is that right?

Scott: Yup.

Whiting: Um, what do you expect of Scott now to come back home? What's that look like?

Mother: Well I think that he, he will probably be a little bit happier because he won't, he's got me to do everything for him.

Mary: Yes // looks to me like

Mother: So then // it, what does he have left? He will go to college somewhere, (names community college), then transfer somewhere, but during that time, he's selfish enough that he will be doing his own thing. He loves, he likes his studies.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: He's you know, I'm sure he's going to do well in that area but he wants that, he wants his sports, he, you know, he wants to take care of his body,

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: do his jogging and, and he can't be bothered with other little things,

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: like things to worry about.

Whiting: // He likes

Mother: That I // will take care of

Whiting: O.K.

The researcher attempted to challenge the family's skewed hierarchy by discussing Mrs. Bender's expectations for Scott.

Mary immediately attempted to intrude but Mrs. Bender talked a little louder enabling her to continue. It was interesting to hear that although Mrs. Bender had maintained earlier that Scott needed to be away from her, she supported their overclose relationship by defining Scott's life.

Mrs. Bender was supporting Scott's age inappropriate behavior.

Mary: You know too, he, he every, anytime something gets a little bit too hard for him, instead of putting out the effort, he will give up. And that's what it seems like he's doing now.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mary: He's got to put a little too much effort into this place, you know, (laughs) and, you know, between having to do for himself, living on campus, and, you know, just,

Mother: (Inaudible)

Mary: just the whole atmosphere, ya.

Mother: // I feel like

Mary: I think that // it's just a little too hard for him. He doesn't feel like putting the effort so he wants to give up and go home.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: And that's not right, gee, you're going to blow it, just for something stupid like that, I don't think it's worth it.

Scott: That's not it.

Mary: // Well,

Scott: O.K. //

Mary: I wish you would tell us!

Scott: I told ya! Don't you guys know by now.

Mary: Something a little bit more than that, Scott.

Scott: No.

The diffuse boundaries enabled Mary to intrude and speak with assumed expertise about Scott. The researcher's question about Mrs. Bender's expectations was lost as the system was maintained.

The diffuse boundaries enabled Mary and her mother to speak simultaneously and this time Mary spoke louder so she finished what she wanted to say.

Mother: Scott you've got to be a little more convincing because three months ago this summer

Mary: (Interrupting) You make it awful vague.

Mother: Springfield College is what you wanted and you wanted to be a teacher. O.K. What changed your mind?

Scott: (Sighs)

Mother: You've got to come up with something?

Scott: I think it's probably because I want to look at the other kinds of fields that there are open you know. That's all I have ever thought about was going into phys ed, the past four years. I never really thought of anything else.

Whiting: O.K.

Scott: So, and I'd like to see what else is out there.

Whiting: O.K. Scott, you, O.K., you're going home, you're going to live at home and go to (community college). Um, it sounds like folks are saying that they're going to continue to make it pretty comfortable for you. Um, is that how it's going to work?

Mary: Ya. (laughs)

Mother: Well, what else are you going to do? It's your own job you know.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: They won't, ah, Mary gets pretty angry with him, she'll ah, you know tell him to shift for himself, but as long as I'm there, you know.

The conversation had changed from mother's expectations for Scott's return home to a united attack about the real reasons why he left.

Aware that the researcher's question was not being addressed, the researcher made another attempt.

Mother and son related to each other in ways inappropriate for a young adult and mother.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: Ya, you spoil him.

Whiting: Is that O.K. with you?

Mother: I, no, because I want him
to be independent.

Paradoxical language.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Bryce is, and Bryce is
only sixteen.

Scott: What do you consider
independent,

Mother: // I, I

Scott: making // your own
breakfast in the morning?

Mary: // Come on.

Mother: A lot // of things, a lot
of things, Scott.

Scott: What does Bryce do that I
don't do, that you consider in the
line, in the way of independency?

Mother: Cause Bryce went out and got
books on colleges and he'd look and
he would // ask questions.

Scott: I researched // too.

Mother: Oh you never, oh you didn't
even, even in high school.

Mary: // Bryce is (inaudible).

Mother: You never // took time to
sit with a counselor.

Mary: He doesn't // need the
pushing like

Scott: The counselors weren't that
good //

The researcher attempted to address Mrs. Bender's feelings about having to provide for Scott and the system was maintained as transactions were incomplete and members began speaking simultaneously.

Mary: you do, to do everything,
you know.

Mother: Now Bryce

Mary: (Interrupting) You don't
have to twist his arm cause he's
independent, he just goes after
what he wants. Nobody has to tell
him what to do, how to do anything.
If he wants to do it, he's just gonna
do it, and you

Once again the topic of
conversation had been
changed. Mother and
Mary were allied in
their attack against
Scott.

Scott: Um.

Mary: God, we got to twist your
ears!

END

Whiting: Scott, you're going home,
O.K.,

Scott: Uh huh.

Whiting: and you're going to live at
home and go to (community college).

Scott: (Deep sigh)

Whiting: What kinds of, what do you
expect from him now?

Mother: What do I expect?

Whiting: Ya. I mean, what are you
going to continue to do for him?

Mother: Everything like I was doing
before.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: When he was in high school.
(laughs)

Mother: Probably.

Whiting: O.K.

The researcher made
another attempt to bring
some clarity to Mrs.
Bender's expectations
of Scott when he
returned home.

The diffuse boundaries
enabled Mary to comment
and a system which sup-
ported Scott's adoles-
cent behavior was
maintained.

Mother: Get mad at him you know.

Whiting: O.K. Is that O.K.?

Mother: No.

Mary: (Laughs)

Mother: It's not O.K.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: If he could live at home
and, and (pause) I guess maybe he
can't do, do it that way either.

Whiting: What way?

Mother: Well, learn to be independent,
you know.

Whiting: But I mean as

Mother: (Interrupting) He can't do
it at home, I don't think.

Whiting: Who's, who runs the house?
Who's in charge of the Bender house?

Mother: Well, I am. (mother smiles,
Mary laughs)

Whiting: O.K. Um, can you, is it fair
to have certain expectations of him?
(pause)

Mother: I think he should do a lot
more than he's doing, for himself.

Whiting: Like what?

Scott: Good question. For instance,
what?

Mother: Well like for instance, before
you told me that you wanted to leave
this college,

Scott: Uh huh.

The researcher attempted
to address the question
directly with Mrs.
Bender as he challenged
the system's skewed
hierarchy.

The researcher directly
challenged the family's
hierarchy. Mary's
laughter suggested that
Mrs. Bender being in
charge was a myth.

Scott asked his mother
a direct question and
in the nature of the
family's transactional
style, a profound change
in the topic occurred.

Mother: you never even call-, picked up the phone and made an appointment with a counselor.

Scott: Because I didn't think I needed to! I thought I knew what I was doing. I know, I know what I'm doing, that's why.

Mother: O.K.

Scott: May, maybe it would be the smarter thing to do but

Whiting: Ah, let's take a look at home. He's coming, he's going to live at home, O.K. He's not going to be here every day, he's going to be home every day, going to school. As the authority person in the home, what, what do you expect of him now, to live there?

Mary: You // expect

Whiting: Will he pay rent? // Will he

Mary: You expect him to work.

Mother: Well, oh ya, he's going to work.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: He's got to work.

Whiting: Do you know what that means?

Scott: Ya. (Mary and Scott snicker)

Mother: I already told him.

Mary: (Interrupting) Do you realize how difficult that's going to be?

Scott: We're talking about, wait a minute, we're talking about as soon as I get home or what are you talking

Again the researcher attempted to address the question directly. Mary attempted to answer for her mother and the researcher tried to block Mary in an attempt to mark hierarchical boundaries.

This attempt failed.

The researcher attempted to have Scott and his mother speak to each other and Mary interrupted, again showing the diffuse boundaries.

about now? Work when?

Mother: As soon as you get home.

Scott: Oh well, I didn't think he
(Whiting) knows that. At least,
like are you talking about till I
// start school?

Mother: Part time. //

Scott: Or

Whiting: You're, you're leaving here
when, Tuesday or Wednesday next week?

Scott: // Ya.

Mother: Uh huh. //

Scott: And she thinks, you know,
I'm working like the two months be-
fore the second semester starts over
there at (community college).

Mother: // You're right.

Scott: That's what // she's talking
about. Ya, I know I am, I know it. I
wasn't sure if he knew.

Mary: Ya, but while you are going to
school, are you going to work too,
while you're going to school?

Scott: Weekends, if you call that work.

Mary: Weekends?

Scott: Ya.

Mary: // Well, how are you

Scott: You don't // carry a full load
at school.

Mary: Well how are you, // how are
you going to pay for that car that you're
supposed to get that's going to get you

It was striking to see
how difficult it was
for members in this
family to bring closure
to any issue.

The system was clearly
maintained as Mary
intervened and spoke
from her position in
the executive subsystem.

back and forth?

Scott: She said she'd give me a loan.
(snickers)

Mother: // No,

Mary: How // would you pay for it
anyway?

Mother: no, Scott, I did not say that.

Scott: I thought you said that.

Mother: Not you, no, uh uh.

Mary: Anyway,

Mother: Nope.

Mary: even if she gave you a, how
would you pay it working, working on
weekends? You've got, you need gas,
to put in the car, that's going to
get you back and forth.

Scott: Um.

Mary: // You know what

Mother: I told you //

Mary: you're going to

Mother: I'd sign for one.

Scott: Uh huh.

Mother: Is that what you're thinking
about? I would co-sign?

Scott: Uh huh.

Mother: But you'd have to have a
pretty darn good part time job and
a good summer job.

Mary: You know you're going to find
out, Scott, that things are going to
be a lot harder once you start doing

It was easy to see how
messages about the car
loan got confused in the
family as direct dyadic
communication between
members was very diffi-
cult to transact.

Just as Mrs. Bender was
clear about what Scott
needed to do to have her
co-sign a loan, Mary in-
tervened in a way that
prevented closure.

that and then you're not gonna want to do that anymore either.

Scott: You're talking about work?

Whiting: O.K. Scott, you're going home next Tuesday or Wednesday, right?

Scott: (Sighs) Yup.

Whiting: Um, what's that going to look like. It sounds like you kind of run the place. Um, and I don't know, that's what people are saying to me. O.K.?

Mother: That's what you're getting out of this huh?

Whiting: Ya, ya.

Mary: What?

Mother: Like Scott is the master

Mary: (Laughs loudly)

Mother: of the house.

Whiting: Ya, I mean that's what

Mother: (Interrupting) The other night, the other weekend, when was he home for his dental appointment? I woke up the next morning, sneakers strewn in the middle of the parlor, snacks all over the table, my house is not like this. Everybody does, in my house, are independent. He's the only one!

Mary: (Laughs)

Mother: I walked in the bathroom without the light on, tripped over his pants.

Whiting: O.K. Is this going to be,

In her topic switch, Mary defined Scott as incompetent.

The researcher attempted again to address the original question. The skewed nature of the family hierarchy was confronted. At times, Mrs. Bender and Mary were in the executive subsystem, yet because Scott was not influenced by them, he was also in the same hierarchy.

he's coming home, he's going to be living at the home now. O.K. Is anything going to be different?

Mary: No! (laughs)

Whiting: O.K. Wait a minute. Let's see, mom's in charge here.

Mother: I don't think so. (Mary laughs)

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Because I, I'd rather live just like that.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Well, what am I going to do? Because of his bad habits, I feel, I feel like I'm sitting with a counselor. (laughs)

Scott: Mike Douglas or something. (everyone laughs) We're talking to Mike.

Mother: And ah, what was I about to say? I lost my train of thought here.

Whiting: You were beginning to feel like you were

Mother: Oh ya, um. He was so bad last year, in his senior year, as far as ah, you know, running the place, ah, watching the ball game on Sunday afternoon. I like these old movies, you know.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: // Ah,

Scott: Ma, can // I say something?

Mother: ah, you know, sometimes

The researcher once again asked the original question. Mary responded and the researcher again attempted to block her by saying that Mrs. Bender was in charge.

A humorous topic switch used as an attempt to leave the interaction incomplete, but Mrs. Bender was able to come back to the issue.

Scott: I think it's just that Bryce and Mary and Clay are perfect, can I

Mother: Ah

Scott: Is it my imagination or is everybody like me? I always thought everybody, you know, (Mary laughs) Bryce grabbed a snack when he wanted to, left his sneakers around, strewn around sometimes. That's only natural. I think you guys are too perfect.

Mary: Ah, ah, far from it. It's just that, ah, you happen to have a few bad habits that you don't want to change. That's all.

Scott: (Sighs)

Mary: // That's all.

Mother: He was so bad. // Ooh, this is what I was going to tell you, during his senior year, I did everything, I would grab a stick and run after him and everything to try to get him to do things, to be cleaner and neater. Bryce it was so easy to train, Bryce and the other kids that I even packed his things and I put them out on the door step. This was a big thing for me to do.

Mary: (Laughs)

Whiting: I bet it was.

Mother: But I'll tell you,

Whiting: I bet it was.

Mother: I did do it, and it was in the middle of winter

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: and, gees, he put his boots on, he put two, two jackets on and a hat and mittens, and he went off

Mother joins Mary in the attack of Scott. Once again the intensity of the relationship between Mrs. Bender was indicated as she reported on the exasperation aspect of their relationship. This interactional style was clearly characteristic of enmeshment as the relationship was overinvolved with a combination of affection and exasperation.

down the street, this was like
about eight o'clock

Mary: (Laughs)

Mother: and ah,

Scott: I knew I was going to be
back, (laughs) two hours. What
the heck.

Mother: so ah,

Mary: What did you do?

Scott: // Nothing.

Mother: anyway, // he, ah, was
good I would say for about a month
he began to look after himself, you
know,

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: pick up after himself and
things like that, and then it
would start all over again

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: little by little. I don't
know maybe I'm to blame. Then
there was another time.

Whiting: Well, I think it takes two
to tango.

Mother: Ya. But other times he
would you know, he's still this way
so

Whiting: O.K., but he's coming home

Mother: O.K.

Whiting: O.K., he's coming home, he's
going to be living with you every
day now.

The tone of Mary's
question suggested a
shift to a positive
alliance.

Mrs. Bender described
the cyclical nature of
their interactional
style.

The family continued to
talk around the question
of Mrs. Bender's expect-
ations of Scott when he
returned home.

Mother: (Laughs) It's going to be awful.

Mary: That's terrible, ma. (laughs loudly)

Mother: Really, he // know

Scott: That's // the reason why she wants me to stay in college so she won't have to put up with it.

Whiting: Scott, what happens when you say, when you feel like saying, I wish these people would get off my back?

Mary: He says it.

Scott: // Ah, I don't say it.

Mother: Oh, (inaudible). //

Mary: You do.

Scott: I do? What? When? Give me an example.

Mary: You start yelling, ranting, and raving,

Scott: I don't think // so.

Mary: and // then you walk away and throw // things around.

Mother: When you // don't get your ways.

Mary: They have a strange relationship, them two. She will, she'll cater to him, she'll cater to his every little whim and then he'll yell at her, you know, it's (laughs)

Scott: I'm not the only one. I've heard you and Bryce and Clay, I mean everybody.

The skewed nature of the family's hierarchy was again demonstrated as Mary spoke with assumed expertise about Scott and their mother.

Mary: Not like you, not like you.

Scott: What? I don't think I yell that much.

Mary: Ya, if she hasn't got things exactly ready for you when you want them, just exactly perfect, as you want them, you'll start yelling.

Scott: Is that true?

Mary: Ya.

Mother: He, he doesn't do it // like

Mary: This is // what I've seen, now I was gone for two years. I can see it the way it is from being back.

Scott: Maybe I'm sarcastic.

Mother: // Ya, but you don't

Scott: But I don't yell. //

Mother: You don't know that he's, he's, it sounds like he's saying it fresh to things like that, but that's not, that's his nature.

Mary: // Ya

Mother: He //

Mary: but nevertheless, he acts like he's your husband, and your supposed to (mother looks shocked) Oh! (anxious laugh) You know, and you're supposed to be catering to him. (pause)

Mother: I don't know.

Mary: That's what I see.

Mother: Well he's not a bad kid that's the, you know.

The family demonstrated its shifting alliance system as Mrs. Bender allied with Scott during Mary's attack.

Mrs. Bender continued to support Scott.

Mary knew she violated a rule in mentioning the word husband as Mrs. Bender almost fell off her chair.

Mary's attack continued while Mrs. Bender remained allied with Scott.

Mary: Well, no, he's not // but
Jesus, ma.

Scott: This is all overexaggerated,
// it is.

Mary: No, it isn't, // no, it isn't.

Scott: Everything. // You're in
front of a camera. (everyone laughs)

Mary: Ya, I'm making it up.

Mother: // He's not a bad kid.

Scott: It's overexaggerated. //

Mary: Oh sure.

Whiting: He's not a bad kid.

Mother: No, // he's not.

Mary: He's not a bad kid, // he's
a good kid.

Mother: So how can a mother neglect
a kid who, who is, ah, constantly,
// ah, good.

Mary: Ya, but the // thing is,
the thing is that he is your, your
little underdog and so, you will say
he's such a good kid, he doesn't do
this, he doesn't do that, you know,
he didn't do the things Clay and
Mary did or, you know, and he's not
a kid like Bryce that's gonna

Mother: // (Inaudible)

Mary: take off // you know, ah,
you look at him more like, he is
your little underdog, you know.

Mother: Ya, you're probably right.

Mary: And so you, because of that,
you spoil him and you make him more

The diffuse boundaries
enabled everyone to
intrude and speak
simultaneously.

The swiftness of the
shifting alliances was
clearly demonstrated
as Mary joined in to
ally with Scott.

Because of Mrs.
Bender's overwhelmed
reaction, Mary had re-
alized that it had been
wrong to suggest that
her brother and mother
related to each other
as husband and wife.
She now chose to define
Scott as his mother's
underdog versus husband.

helpless than he already is
instead of trying to

Mother: Well, how am I supposed to
do that? Now,

Mary: I don't know! No! I don't
know, ma.

Mother: See the trouble you cause us.

Scott: (Anxious laugh)

Mary: No, but that's true, that's
the way you, you treat him! And, so
he gets even more spoiled and more
helpless because he's always (in-
audible).

Scott: (Shakes head)

Mary: Yes, Scott.

Scott: No way that's true.

Mary: No?

Scott: No.

Mary: Uh uh.

Whiting: How do you see it, Scott?

Scott: How do I see it? I don't
think it's anywhere near as bad

Whiting: O.K.

Scott: as it looks.

Mary: Explain it.

Scott: Explain it?

Mary: Ya.

Scott: No, I better not.

Mary: (Laughs)

Scott: Well O.K. It seems like all the problems fall on me.

Whiting: O.K.

Scott: You know. Everything, you guys get mad, you know, you know what I'm saying! Take it out on somebody, right?

Mary: Oh ya.

Scott: And it all falls on me cause half the cookie jars gone. Ah, it's got to be Scott, immediately, right?

Mother: It usually is.

Mary: (Laughs)

Scott: Oh ya, never Clay, never Mary, Scott, it had to be Scott you know.

Mother: You know because it always is.

Scott: (Laughs) Come on now.

Mary: (Laughs)

Scott: After a while I start thinking I'm like that.

Whiting: What would happen to this family, Scott, what would happen in this family if you weren't around for a while?

Scott: (Laughs) I don't know, I've been gone two and a half months and I came back. (knocks on the arm of his chair) It's been pretty nice.

Whiting: O.K. But do you have some fears about what might happen to folks? It seems like you're saying, hay I'm the fall guy, ah, everybody else is responsible, and does things the way they're supposed to and I kind of take the heat for a lot of things. I'm the

bad guy. Um, what, what happens when you're out of the picture?

Mary: Ya, who do we take our frustrations out on?

Scott: I keep ma on the ball, right ma? (laughs)

Mother: Um.

Scott: I keep you on the ball.

Mother: Who? Who keeps me

Scott: I keep you active, right ma?
I don't know

Mother: Who does, Scott?

Scott: I do ma!

Mother: You keep me active.

Scott: Ya, O.K.? (Mary laughs) I was only kidding.

Mother: Well, you're, you're right.

Whiting: Ya, I think there's some truth.

Mother: Ya, my life is really been, ah, comfortable, ah I, I love Scott, I do, I miss him. I call him sometimes. I don't want to call him too much because I don't want him to be embarrassed about it.

Mary: Did you know

Whiting: Well, it's clear people really care about each other.

Mother: Ya, but, well look it when we went to the community college the other day, he wanted to look into what they've got for a program and, ah, he was embarrassed that I was with him. He

Mary intruded and the topic changed. Dyadic transactions were very difficult to complete.

Again because of the transactional style of the family, the researcher's question got sidetracked.

Mrs. Bender and Scott again demonstrated the overinvolved nature of their relationship as they both investigated the possibilities of a community college.

didn't see any other parents there,
yet we accomplished a lot because
I was with him.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: See he can't do this on
his own.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Scott: I could do it on // my own.

Mother: He wants to // but he
doesn't.

Scott: You just followed me, that's
all.

Mother: We hit everything, we hit
every office because of, and yet
I'll tell him if you want to do it
yourself, do this, do that, do that,
that, and send him out the door,
comes back and he's done nothing.
Scott is not, ah, I don't think he's
that mature.

Mrs. Bender continued
to relate to Scott as
if he were a young
adolescent.

Mrs. Bender spoke with
assumed expertise about
Scott's inabilities to
function without her,
again supporting the
analysis of the overin-
volved nature of their
relationship.

END

When the researcher called Mrs. Bender to arrange a time for the interview, she said that Scott needed a male influence in his life. She said she felt limited in her ability to guide Scott. The following transcript occurred after the researcher addressed Mrs. Bender regarding this concern.

Mother: And then, or, and since I
don't have a lot of answers being
a woman, sometimes I'll say to
Bryce or Scott too, well maybe you,
you know, you shouldn't do this, or
you shouldn't do that or maybe we
ought to do this or that if it's
something mechanical or something

around the house, and right away,
ah, they know better than I do.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: See because they're maturing
and turning into men a little bit
more, you know.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: So even if I could be right,
I'm losing the battle.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: It's because I'm a female.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: See they're starting, they're
turning into men,

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: and they're getting a little
bit more knowledge, but by the same
token, I'm, I feel as though I'm
guiding them but, if // they only
had a

Whiting: Feel some limits. //

Mother: Ya, now if I said to him,
you're staying at Springfield College,
Scott, you made a mistake, you're
staying the rest of the year, see how
you feel in the summer, ah, I could
do that, I could do that.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: But, I don't even know myself
for sure.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: You know maybe if I had a
husband and he says look it, we put

Mrs. Bender seemed stressed that her function and identity in the family would be gone as the children matured. At a developmental time when change was appropriate, the family was having a difficult time creating new interactual patterns.

Because of the skewed nature of the family hierarchy, Mrs. Bender was unable to appropriately influence Scott. Since the boundaries were diffuse, Mrs. Bender was unable to use her parental authority.

money into you for this year, blah,
blah, you know, you're going to do it

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: and then if you change your
mind, you know, O.K. next year.
Maybe that might be different.

Scott: I'm freezing in here.

Mother: I, I'll tell you, I haven't
said to him and I suppose I could
say to him you are staying

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: and that's all, until next
year and see how you feel, but, ah,
I don't know. Maybe I don't know
him, don't trust him.

Whiting: What if you try that?

Mother: Um.

Whiting: Why don't you say that?

Mary: (Laughs) Ya, that would be

Mother: Know what's going to happen?
Scott is, I feel Scott is lazy enough
to stay. He would do it if I told
him he had to.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: And then change over next
year, now in the meantime, money is
being poured into it, he doesn't care.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: It's just a way of bidding his
time for the rest of the year. This
is what I'm afraid of.

Whiting: So it's hard to be

Because of the diffuse
boundaries and Mrs.
Bender's assumed total
knowledge of her son,
she predicted what Scott
would do before he had
an opportunity to
respond.

Mother: (Interrupting) See I wish,
if I had a husband.

Whiting: // It's hard to be firm,

Mary: You think that's true? //

Whiting: is what your saying.

Mother: Ya, for me.

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: Like she shouldn't have gone
to Colorado. I let her go, she was
twenty. What are you going to do?

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I knew that I didn't want her
to go there. Not because I was going
to miss her, but, so much which I did
but

Whiting: Sure.

Mother: ah, the thing is she wanted to
go to Colorado. I said that's so far
away from your family, you know. She
went and she said it was a good ex-
perience, but she, ah, she's back home
now.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: Ah, it was a good experience,
but she found out that it's, you know,
family is important. At least not,
maybe if not, she probably won't
always live at home, but close by you
know. (pause) But I don't know.

Whiting: Do you know what your mom's
talking about?

Scott: Ya.

Whiting: The idea if she said to you,
Scott // stay here

The skewed nature of the
family's hierarchy was
supported by Mrs.
Bender's incompetent
feelings as the head of
the family.

Mrs. Bender indicated
that she also felt
helpless influencing
Mary.

Mrs. Bender spoke with
assumed expertise about
Mary's feelings, ideas,
and plans for the future.

Scott: You got to stay //

Whiting: for the year.

Scott: if she said that.

Whiting: That, you'd, that she fears
that you might just do that and kind
of ride along.

Mary: What do you think you would
do?

Scott: Ah,

Mary: Would you // just

Scott: I think // I would probably
stay, but I don't know why. I think

Mary: No,

Scott: if, if she told me that, I
think I would stay.

Mary: but how do you think you would
do?

Scott: Wha-?

Mary: Do you think you would let
everything slide?

Scott: Oh, no way. I'd keep every-
thing up, I'd just still be in the
clouds not knowing if, you know, I'm,
it's kind of tough when you, you know,
moving towards something, it's like,
you know,

Mother: Ya, what I // think Scott
needs,

Scott: moving nowhere. //

Mother: I think Scott needs a man. A
man he could look up to, that's going
to sit down and say, Scott, ah, you
know this is what I, I think you ought

Since Scott had not
responded to his
mother's statement about
asking him to remain in
college, the researcher
attempted to return to
that unfinished issue.
The system was maintained
as Mary began speaking
with Scott when the issue
was between he and his
mother.

to do with yourself because, you know, you're that kind of a person. Well what, what I said to him, if a man that he looked up to can say that, I think that Scott would be, would be all right. I can't do it. I'm a mother. (pause) See how important a father can be. I, I just can't do those two jobs, just can't.

Whiting: Well, I just thought I heard Scott say if you told him,

Mother: Um.

Whiting: he would.

Mother: I, I am influential with Scott, but, I don't want to do that! That is not what, he's going to be nineteen years old. Am I for the rest of his, for, ah, well, not for the rest of his life, but how long is this going to last? That I'm going to say, Scott you're going to do this, you're going to get a job, you're going to do that, and you're going to do that.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I'm tired of it. I don't want to do that.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Yet, I feel he needs some kind of, some male influence to get him started, you know, to do his own thinking for, well there's an example, we went to community college and we went around and we learned a lot. Why? Because I was there with him. We went from office to office. I went, I wanted to talk to this and that one, he didn't care.

Mrs. Bender again demonstrated her feelings of incompetence regarding her ability to influence Scott. It inferred that the family never developed interactional patterns needed by a single parent household.

Clearly the family members were demonstrating their inability to complete transactions. Just as Mrs. Bender had the opportunity to influence Scott to stay in college, she rejected this approach, thereby maintaining the system's rules against completing transactions.

Mrs. Bender did not view Scott as a young adult and his behavior maintained their overinvolved relationship.

END

In the final transcripts, the family members continued to demonstrate how rigidly they maintained their enmeshed interactional patterns. Change was very threatening to this family system.

Whiting: You're going home next week.

Scott: Uh huh.

Whiting: All right. And you're going to be living together. What's that going to be like?

Scott: Same as it was before, I guess. Except this time I'll probably have to buckle down, I guess.

Mother: You're asking me?

Scott: Ya. (laughs) It'll be the same. It's no ways near as bad as you think it is. You just, I swear to God you guys blow it up out of proportion. I'm really not as, you know,

Mary: No, you're // not.

Scott: dependent // as you make me sound.

Mary: Ya, but, well you don't show us otherwise, // Scott.

Scott: At least // I don't think I am.

Mary: Maybe you are more independent than you show us, but we don't know it.

Mother: Maybe you ought to go and take, ah, a room somewhere. Maybe you ought to go down and live with Memere (French for grandmother).

Scott: Oh gees.

Mother: Oh no, Memere would spoil him too much.

A final attempt was made to address the question of Scott's return home and Mrs. Bender's expectations.

In maintaining the system's rule against completing transactions, Mrs. Bender did not answer Scott's question.

Mary allied to support Scott.

Mary quickly shifted her support and attacked Scott.

Instead of dealing directly with the issue, a new solution is offered.

Scott: Come on.

Mother: That wouldn't be good.

Mary: Are you kidding?

Mother: All right let me put it this way. How would you like to, if you had the opportunity, to get, get a room and live by yourself independently? Get back and forth to the community college, would you want to do that?

Scott: Ya, I think I would.

Mother: You'd have // to work to take care

Scott: Where's the money // going to, where's the money going to come from to get me a room and a car?

Mother: Don't say you think. I want the truth, I want what's really in your heart.

Scott: Ya, // I would.

Mary: If you could // work it out?

Mother: If you could work it out?

Scott: Ya, I would, it would be a little more of a hassle, but I think I would. I don't know, maybe, maybe not this year, you know. Probably next year or the year after. I'm, I'm being honest. She wants me to be honest. I, ah, I don't think I would this year.

Mary: Why?

Scott: Cause. Maybe anothe- one, one more year of seasoning. You know.

Mother: Now I said to Scott, call Mr. Whiting

The limited interactional style of the family showed itself again as members were speaking simultaneously.

Scott maintained the system. The more his mother infantilized him, the more opportunities he provided to continue this pattern.

Mrs. Bender dramatically changed the conversation.

Mary: (Laughs) (inaudible)

Mother: and tell him I want, I'm
trying constantly to have him do his
own thing. To do, ah, (Scott sighs)
for himself.

Whiting: Uh huh.

Mother: because he's, like when I
went to the community college, he
says, gees, this I feel embarrassed
// being here with you.

Whiting: What if you stopped, //
what if you stopped doing those things?

Mother: What's going to happen to
Scott?

Whiting: Ah, O.K. What // might
happen?

Scott: That's a good question. //

Whiting: What might happen?

Mother: Ah, things wouldn't get done!

Whiting: Like what? (pause) You go
on strike, O.K.? (Scott snickers)
You declare a work stoppage. All
right, he's coming home. O.K., what's
going to happen to this young man?

Mother: The rest of the family is
going to be miserable.

Whiting: O.K.

Mary: (Snickers)

Whiting: Because you're not taking care
of him?

Mother: No, because he is going to
make their lives miserable.

Whiting: O.K.

The researcher chal-
lenged the overinvolved
relationship which was
maintained by Scott and
his mother.

The question was not
answered directly and
enmeshment was supported
as Scott's behavior was
supposedly capable of
affecting other family
members.

Mother: That's what.

Mary: (Laughs loudly)

Mother: That's what's going to happen.

Scott: How do I make your lives miserable? How does all this fit in? You always say that too.

Mother: // Well ask your sister.

Whiting: What would that look like? // What would that look like?

Mother: It wouldn't be too good.

Whiting: No, but I mean, I'm not sure what, how he would do that? How would he do that?

Mother: Make everybody's life miserable?

Whiting: Uh huh. (pause)

Scott: // Start,

Mother: Well // supposing you answer that, Mary.

Scott: go ahead.

Mary: // Well

Scott: See // I

Mary: I feel funny.

Scott: I love that question. You can't think of it, can you?

Whiting: No, this is mom's. Mom you say, time out! You've been away. Things have been nice while you've been away. It's been really different for me. I haven't been having to do all these things. I've enjoyed that, it's been nice. O.K.? I'm taking a

The system was maintained as dyadic transactions between members were difficult to complete. An attempt was made to restructure this pattern.

Mother deferred to Mary and the researcher challenged this interactional pattern and directed the issue back to Mrs. Bender.

time out here, from having to run around and pick up all the corn flakes after you, O.K.? Ah, you stop doing that, what's going to happen to him?

Mother: Well do you want the truth?

Whiting: Ya.

Mother: I really don't think anything is going to happen to Scott as far as that little area goes, but a lot is going to happen to us.

The question was left unanswered. Once again the behavior of Scott was predicted to affect other family members.

Whiting: O.K., like what?

Mother: Well because for one thing, you talk about corn flakes, every time he opens the cereal, it falls all over the kitchen rug. We vacuum that every night.

Mary: (Laughs)

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: // Ah,

Scott: I don't // believe it.

Mother: that's Bryce's job.

Whiting: O.K.

The system was maintained as members related to Scott developmentally as a young adult.

Mother: Cereal all over the counter and the rug. Right or am I wrong?

END

Whiting: He's coming home, he's going to be home next week and you're saying it's been nice with him away, but I can see it now, I can see socks and jocks and t-shirts all over the place.

Mother: You know I said to him, call Mr. Whiting and tell him that we will

Dramatic topic change.

meet him, if seven o'clock is all right. No, you're supposed to do that. You're supposed to do it. (pause) You know if I left it up to him, we wouldn't be sitting here talking to you tonight.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: Because he would not make that call. I know he wouldn't.

Mary: // (Inaudible)

Scott: What do you // mean?

Mother: I called you and asked you to please make that call.

Scott: Well I figured, I figured, ah, he wanted you to make the call cause, cause it's your convenience. You asked me when it was convenient.

Mother: Scott, didn't I say to you it would be nice if you made that call. That you're the guy going to college. I've spoken to you about this before, haven't I?

Scott: Uh.

Mother: About these things, and he will never do them.

Whiting: O.K.

Mother: I think I have to die, cause they won't, Mary and Clay won't. They won't pamper him.

Scott: (Sighs)

Mother: But see I don't want him to just, you know, maybe fall on his face. Maybe I haven't got confidence in him. Maybe that's what's wrong with me. I don't know. I've never tested him.

Scott's behavior maintained their relationship. The more Mrs. Bender infantilized Scott, the more opportunities he provided to maintain this interactional style.

The inability to see any solution was described by Mrs. Bender.

Whiting: O.K. (long pause)

Mary: Could // have a good education.

Mother: And it's easy // to say.
I should, I should.

Whiting: Do you know what your mother's talking about? (long pause)

Scott: So in other words what, what all this is coming up to that is that you want me to stay in college, cause you don't want me home.

Mother: No.

Scott: Well that's what it's sounding like.

Mary: No, // well that's just,

Scott: That's what it sounds like. //

Mary: that's just the point we've been talking about because you're so dependent on everybody. That's why we want you to stay on campus. But that's not why we want you to stay at Springfield College.

Scott: You never know. Deep down inside that could be it. But

Mary: No! Uh uh, cause me and mom have talked about it. She'd like you to go to the community college just so that you won't have a big bill. You know.

Scott: Right.

Mary: Be less expensive, less worries, less hassles, you know. But, she worries about whether, and I do too, about whether you know what kind of job you're going to be able to get.

The researcher made one final attempt to have Scott and his mother talk together about a specific issue and he changed the topic.

The system maintained itself as Mary spoke for her mother, and spoke with assumed expertise about her brother. Unequivocally, the Bender family had a very limited style of interacting which was characteristic of enmeshment.

Scott: Um.

Mary: Because you can't do anything!
You're not interested in anything but
sports and stuff like that

Scott: Um.

Mary: and with you without an in-
terest, you have no motivation!

END

4. Family's developmental stage. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5a. Current life context - sources of support. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? The interviewed family members demonstrated a very limited range of interactional patterns as they rigidly adhered to an interactional style which was characteristic of enmeshment. Scott's returning home seemed to ensure that this style of relating would be maintained. By returning home, family members could continue to be overinvolved with one another in a manner which supported non differentiation.

Returning home would assist in maintaining the intense relationship between Mrs. Bender and Scott. Their relationship would continue to function with a mixture of affection and exasperation for one another.

7. Capacity for restructuring. There were no changes from the initial assessment.

This last section concludes with an analysis of the similarities and differences between this researcher's structural assessments and the one completed by the research assistant. Final comments on the Bender family will also be included.

All of the structural assessments supported each other considerably. They were consistent regarding the family's developmental stage and the current life context of the family. All of the assessments were consistent in their analysis of the family's diffuse boundaries. Since the boundaries were diffuse, members spoke for each other, assumed expertise about each other, intruded into conversations, and spoke simultaneously. This interactional style often seemed to prevent members from completing dyadic interactions. This family demonstrated another characteristic of enmeshment by showing its shifting alliance system. This pattern was evident throughout the interview.

All of the structural assessments conceptualized Scott's returning home as a homeostatic process which would aid in preventing the family from changing. At a time when changing the family's style of interacting was appropriate and to be expected, the interviewed family members were rigidly clinging to an interactional style which impaired all members' sense of autonomy.

The researcher's final structural assessment differed slightly from the initial assessment and the one completed by the research assistant. The first two structural assessments showed Mrs. Bender,

Mary, and Scott together in the same executive subsystem. In the final structural assessment, it was suggested that the system enabled Scott to vacillate between the executive subsystem and the sibling subsystem. The reason for this analysis was because the executive subsystem demonstrated its inability to perform the appropriate tasks of guidance and control, even though Mrs. Bender and Mary did not relate to Scott as a peer. Scott maintained Mrs. Bender's infantilizing, yet she was unable to influence him positively.

The only area where there was a difference in the structural assessments was in the speculation about the family's capacity for restructuring. The research assistant felt that the family's capacity for restructuring was fair, whereas the researcher was less optimistic. Though all of the assessments reacted to the rigidity of the family's interactional patterns, there was this slight difference in the speculation about the family's ability to change.

In this family, which was verbal and lively, no specific interactional evidence was provided that would suggest that Scott was the conflict defuser in the family. All of the interviewed members in the family did, however, interact in a manner which suggested that the family as a whole had a low tolerance for conflict. Characteristic of enmeshment, family members intruded into each other's conversations and spoke simultaneously which prevented transactions from being completed, thus avoiding conflict. The conflicts which were reported were primarily between Mrs. Bender and Scott. These conflicts appeared to be characteristic of their enmeshed relationship which was intense as

as it combined qualities of affection and exasperation.

To conclude, it was speculated that Scott would transfer to the neighboring community college and live at home. For Scott, it appeared that being at Springfield College, which was thirty minutes away from home, was a violation of his powerful sense of loyalty to the family. By returning home, he was perpetuating a family myth that he was incompetent and immature.

It would be interesting to interview the family several years from now to see if Scott was more autonomous as a result of his mother becoming actively involved in raising her grandchildren who lived downstairs in her home. Possibly if Mrs. Bender were raising young grandchildren, an appropriate interactional shift might occur between her and Scott. Scott would no longer need to provide her with the opportunities to care for him and she would no longer need to take care of him.

Section VII - Integration of the Data

Before reviewing the integration of the data, the reader is reminded of the concept of circularity in family therapy theory. When analyzing behavior from the interactional perspective, individual behavior is seen as both caused by the system and causative in terms of maintenance. Efforts will be made to give examples of circularity in this integration section.

The data from the structural assessments was examined to discern the patterns of interpersonal transactions in the family system of the dropout students, paying particular attention to the families' enmeshment and the patterns of conflict defusing behavior in the triadic relationship of the student and his/her parents. Although two areas of the structural assessments were the focus of this investigation, additional data from the structural assessments, such as the current life context of the family, will be reviewed. The last analysis of the structural assessments will include a review of the similarities and differences between the structural assessments completed by the researcher and the research assistant. Finally, because of the exploratory nature of this investigation, unanticipated findings will be described. Accordingly, this section is organized into five major divisions: (1) enmeshment, (2) conflict defusing interactional patterns, (3) additional data from the structural assessments, (4) similarities and differences in the structural assessments, and (5) unanticipated findings.

Enmeshment. Without question, all of the structural assessments revealed that the six interviewed families demonstrated interpersonal transactional patterns which were characteristic of enmeshment. Not only was enmeshment demonstrated very clearly, it appeared to be the only interactional style available to the members of these families. Evidence of enmeshment is presented under the headings: members speaking for each other, members speaking with assumed expertise, impairment of differentiation in the service of family loyalty, and family hierarchy.

Members speaking for each other. With the possible exception of case five, the Gray family, all the families demonstrated diffuse boundaries, which enabled members to speak for each other. On a few occasions, Beth Gray spoke for her mother and brother, but this was more the exception than the rule. However, in the other families, when the researcher directed a question to a specific family member, the diffuse boundaries enabled other members to speak not only for each other but to interrupt, intrude, and speak simultaneously. Although the diffuse boundaries supported this interactional style, its function varied. For example, in the Johnson-Smith family, when Mr. Smith was initially asked questions by the researcher, Mrs. Smith spoke for him. Interactionally it appeared as if her speaking for him served to support Mr. Smith's disengaged position in the family. However, Mrs. Smith's speaking for Steven, and vice versa, functioned to support the overinvolved nature of their relationship. This function of supporting overinvolved relationships was seen readily in the Adams family, the

Rush family, the Gold family, and the Bender family. When members spoke for each other in these families, it was in the service of maintaining overinvolvement between members. Even in the Adams family, which was the most reserved and difficult family to join, Sally demonstrated her capacity to speak for her mother and vice versa. This ability to speak for other family members enabled members, especially the mothers in the interviewed families, to speak with assumed expertise about their children. Examples are presented in the following section.

Speaking with assumed expertise. All of the mothers spoke as if they had more knowledge of their children than the children had of themselves. The frequency and intensity of this phenomenon did vary among the families. Mrs. Rush offered the most classic example of her ability to speak about her children when she stated, "You know, you can almost read their minds. I can anyway." Believing that she possessed this ability, it was not surprising to hear Mrs. Rush make comments about Robert such as, "You feel as though you're not as good as you thought you were!" and "You feel very secure at home." It was apparent again when they discussed Robert's moving in with his older sister. Mrs. Rush commented that Sheila would pamper him and that Robert might like this. When Robert indicated uncertainty about liking being pampered, Mrs. Rush asserted, "You will, I know you will." It is important to remember that whenever this phenomenon happened, Robert rarely challenged his mother's perception which, in effect, maintained this interactional style.

The other family which clearly demonstrated this phenomenon was the Bender family. In this family, Scott's sister, Mary, and his mother often spoke with assumed expertise about Scott. For example, Mrs. Bender maintained that Scott was "that kind of person" and "Scott is a homebody, he's always been." Near the end of the interview Mary verbalized, "Because you can't do anything! You're not interested in anything but sports and stuff like that." The reader is well aware that these are only a few examples of an interactional style which showed itself frequently in the interview with the Benders. All of the other families demonstrated this same capacity to speak with assumed expertise regarding their members, but it was not as prevalent as it was in the Rush and Bender families.

Related to having assumed expertise about family members was the sense of similarity between members. For example, the sameness between the dropout student and his or her mother was shown in both the Gray and Gold families. On one occasion Mrs. Gray stated, "Don is a lot like myself" and, another time, she maintained that "Our personalities are still the same." Mrs. Gold commented about the similarity between herself and Julie when she said, "We're very much alike."

This interactional data which showed members speaking with assumed expertise regarding other members and describing similarities between members were clearly characteristics of enmeshment. Since no one in these families ever challenged the reality of these statements, everyone perpetuated this style of interaction. Because members tended to support these statements about themselves, these families demonstrated

a heightened sense of loyalty which impaired differentiation. This is another characteristic of enmeshment. The dropout students seemed willing to sacrifice their autonomous educational plans because of their heightened sense of family loyalty. In enmeshed families, Minuchin et al. (1978) asserts, "The denial of self for another's benefit and family loyalty are highly valued" (p. 60). A review of this concept in relationship to each family follows.

Impairment of differentiation in the service of family loyalty.

Although the researcher's and research assistant's speculated reasons why each student dropped out of college were somewhat unique to each family system, there was a generalized theme that all of the students had difficulty differentiating themselves from their family.

In the Johnson-Smith family, Steven appeared to go along with the family myth that his life experiences would be the same as several other members of his family. In talking about his relationship with his 16 year old girlfriend, Mrs. Smith commented, "I mean I've already lived through what he's going through, so has his stepfather, so has his father, so has his stepmother. I mean we have all been through it." With Steven withdrawing from college after two weeks, he appeared to be demonstrating his loyalty to the family by working towards having an early marriage that would more than likely become problematic and end in divorce. Steven also stated that he probably would not find himself until he was almost 35 years old which seemed somewhat characteristic of his parents and stepparents.

Sally Adams' decision to attend a college 10 hours away from home

appeared to be a violation of both nuclear and extended family rules about leaving home. Because of the rigid boundary between the family and the outside world, members in these families were expected to have their needs met within the family and the community where they all resided. It appeared as if Sally's plans to go away to college were sabotaged subtly by Mrs. Adams as she knew Sally would return home sooner or later, and that her decision to return home was seen as the only feasible solution to her loneliness. The limited problem solving ability of the family, as well as the family's immediate support of her decision to return home, clearly seemed to impair her sense of autonomy.

Shortly after Robert Rush went away to college, the family appeared to begin to disintegrate. His older sister "suddenly" left home to live with her boyfriend and Mrs. Rush announced her plans to be married one week before Robert decided to leave college. With Mrs. Rush planning to marry, sell her home and move to another state, the future of Peg, the youngest child in the family, seemed very uncertain. It was uncertain where or with whom she was going to live. It appeared that Robert was willing to sacrifice his own independent plans to "rescue the family". With the apparent stress in the family, it was as if Robert's heightened sense of loyalty to the family pulled him home. In his position of mother's ally, his returning home seemed to ensure her marital plans. He was aware that Peg was stressed about the possibility of their mother's marriage and that he could support Peg if he were home and not in college. It was striking also in this family to

see the difficult time Mrs. Rush had justifying an independent life beyond her immediate family.

For Julie Gold to remain in college, the alliance between her and her mother would be threatened. It is speculated that although their alliance had a lengthy history, they became more peer-like during the previous year when they were the only members living at home. With Julie having always been very supportive of her mother, it appeared that Mrs. Gold needed Julie home, and Julie needed to be home. The fall had been stressful with the death of Mrs. Gold's mother and the initiation of divorce proceedings. Although Mrs. Gold had begun to look to Shirley for support, the family myth was that she was not empathic and could not be very helpful to either Julie or her mother. Julie's decision to leave college, which was supported by her mother, one week after she had accompanied her mother to divorce court, seemed associated with her willingness to postpone her own autonomy to remain the loyal helper.

In the Gray family, there was a history of stress and conflict during the past several years. There had been a conflicted marriage which ended in divorce and the stressful illness and death of Mrs. Gray's mother. It is speculated that it is not coincidental that shortly after these stressful events occurred, both Don and his sister, Beth, became difficult for Mrs. Gray to handle. Both of these children left the home and lived away for a period of time. It was as if the children were willing to have problems so that Mrs. Gray could worry about them and not about her problems. It seemed that Don's attempt

to go to college full time and work full time at night was destined to fail. He seemed willing to be identified as the troubled member of the family in an attempt to alleviate other family stresses. Some of the speculations of the functional nature of members' problems came from Beth's attempt to identify herself as having the problems later in the interview. Members in this family seemed so oriented to helping each other by escalating around pain and problems that they were not able to see themselves separate from the family.

For Scott Bender to have a sense of autonomy outside of his family, some very rigid rules about his perceptions of himself and his family's perceptions of him would have to change. In a sense, the more Mrs. Bender and Mary infantilized Scott, the more opportunities he provided them, thus enabling this interactional style to continue. It seemed clear that members of this family had a heightened sense of belongingness and loyalty that impaired everyone's ability to differentiate from the family. Although Clay and Mary were identified as being independent, it was striking to see that they returned home to live after being away for four and two years respectively.

At a developmental stage with young adults leaving home, it is appropriate for families to change their interactional patterns. The decision for these six students to return home would serve only to rigidify the family system and maintain overcloseness and loyalty at the price of differentiation and autonomous functioning. The next area for review is the hierarchical organization in the researched families.

Family hierarchy. Five of the six interviewed families demonstrated interactional patterns which supported a skewed family hierarchy. These families appeared to have difficulty defining the areas of parental power and responsibility. This is not uncommon in families with adolescent children as the number of areas in which children and adults can relate more equally increases with the age of the children. However, even with young adults, there remains many areas in which parents can assert their parental authority. The inability to assert this influence appeared in most of the families.

Three families, the Johnson-Smiths, the Golds, and the Grays, repeatedly demonstrated interactional styles, characteristic of a skewed hierarchy. The peer-like quality of the relationships between the dropout students and their mothers was shown frequently during the interviews with these families. As a result, the mothers in these families questioned their ability to influence the lives of the dropout students and the dropout students tended to avoid looking to his or her parent for guidance. It is speculated that this peer-like quality of the relationship between parent and child made the transition to college more difficult for both members of the family. This was most apparent in the Gold family when Julie stated how difficult it had been to leave and she was worried that it would be even more difficult to leave home the next time she tried.

It is speculated also, that if these students had a peer-like relationship with their parent, there would be little need to develop peer relationships outside of the family. Don Gray did not appear

to have either the time or interest in developing peer relationships. Working full time and commuting to college would have the impact of separating him from many of his classmates. Steven Smith had a variety of complaints about dormitory living and the college's curriculum after being on campus three weeks. Julie Gold indicated that she was frightened to cross campus by herself which suggested that she was cut off from peers who, perhaps, were dealing with similar concerns and possible solutions. It is suggested that the effect of this peer-like relationship with the students' parents made it difficult for these young adults to find age appropriate peers.

Because of the nature of the families' interactional patterns, the Rush and Bender families demonstrated the ability to fluctuate between a skewed hierarchy and a more balanced hierarchy. Clearly, Robert Rush and Scott Bender interacted in ways that supported their mothers' influencing their lives, yet they interacted in ways which suggested their relationships with their mothers were more peer-like.

It was striking to see in both of these families that even though there were some shifts in the organizational structure, the boundaries remained diffuse regardless of the hierarchical organization. Even when the hierarchy included only mother in the executive subsystem, the interactional patterns reflected overinvolvement. These same interactional patterns of overinvolvement appeared when both mothers and sons were in the executive subsystem. These families demonstrated clearly their preference for an interactional style characteristic of enmeshment even when there were changes in the hierarchical

organization.

Although the research assistant placed Sally Adams in the parental subsystem, she did not offer much interactional evidence for this configuration. The researcher placed her in the sibling subsystem in both of his structural assessments. The researcher was of the opinion that there was little interactional evidence showing Sally involved in the parental subsystem. Sally spoke for her mother on a few occasions, which provided evidence suggesting diffuse boundaries, yet, it did appear that there was a hierarchical differentiation between Mrs. Adams and Sally.

The preceding section reviewed all the cases regarding the families' interpersonal transactional patterns which were characteristic of enmeshment. It was very apparent that these families were limited in their interactional style and that interactional patterns other than enmeshment were not in these families transactional repertoire. Another characteristic of enmeshment is a low tolerance for open conflict among family members. As the researcher was analyzing the data to see if any of the three conflict defusing interactional patterns emerged, a separate review follows.

Conflict defusing interactional patterns. The researcher had speculated that one of the reasons why a first semester freshmen student might drop out of college was that she/he had functioned in the role of a conflict defuser in the family. The researcher intended to analyze the nature of the triadic relationship between the student and his/her parents to see if any of the conflict defusing interactional

patterns of triangulation, parent-child coalition, or detouring were present. An unexpected finding, which will be reviewed in more detail later in this paper, was that five of the six cases involved single parent families. In the Bender family, Mr. Bender died in 1972 and Mrs. Bender did not remarry. In the Johnson-Smith family, there had been a divorce, remarriage, and subsequent separation, while in the Rush, Gold, and Gray families, no fathers were present because of the parents' divorces. As a result, it became impossible to assess directly the three triadic conflict defusing interactional patterns. However, because the families demonstrated how they dealt with conflict and provided the researcher with interactional data about the presence of conflict defusing interactional patterns, this section is divided into two headings: triadic conflict defusing patterns and general conflict defusing patterns.

Triadic conflict defusing patterns. The family which provided the most direct evidence of a student having functioned in the role of a conflict defuser was the Gold family. There was clear interactional evidence which suggested that a parent-child coalition had been present in the family. From the interactional data provided in the interview, Mrs. Gold and Julie had been allied against Mr. Gold for several years. Even after the parents' separation and recent divorce, it was striking to see that this cross generational alliance between Julie and her mother maintained itself and began to function with Julie and her mother against the older child, Shirley. As reported earlier, it was speculated that Julie's decision to drop out, which was

supported by her mother, was an attempt to ensure the maintenance of this cross generational alliance between these two members. A rigid triad between mother, Julie, and father was repeating itself: mother, Julie, and Shirley.

The Rush family presented interactional evidence that a sibling was detouring conflict between the spouses of a marriage which had terminated in a divorce 11 years ago. Robert, the dropout student, did not demonstrate the capacity to defuse conflict, but his younger sister, Peg, seemed to be the focus of continued struggles between these divorced parents.

The only father who was involved in the interview was Steven Johnson's stepfather, Mr. Smith. In the interview, no interactional data emerged which suggested that Steven functioned in the role of conflict defuser between the separated couple of Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

General conflict defusing patterns. While it was impossible to analyze directly the nature of the triadic relationship between the dropout students and their parents, the dropouts' families did demonstrate a low tolerance for open conflict, which is characteristic of enmeshment. The interactional style, which kept conflict at a low level, was similar in all of the families. It was very apparent that it was difficult for these families to complete dyadic transactions between members. This inability manifested itself in a variety of ways. Often times, topics of conversation were changed very dramatically and swiftly, thus preventing closure or completion of the issues being discussed. This was demonstrated dramatically in the

Johnson-Smith, Rush, and Bender families. It was also evident, to some degree, in the Adams family. The inability to complete transactions was demonstrated by members interrupting and intruding into conversations. Often the researcher would ask a member of a family a specific question and another would answer. The diffuseness of the families' boundaries, as described earlier in this section, supported this interactional style.

The Gray family differed from the other families in that conflicts were more evident between members. However, even though conflicts were more apparent in this family, interactionally they resembled the other families as closure concerning conflicted issues was never achieved. The researcher's attempts to have Mrs. Gray and Don speak directly with each other about the rules concerning how they treat one another never materialized. The Gray family, like the others, was unable to resolve concerns. It was for this reason that the researcher speculated that conflicts in this family were well calibrated and functional for system maintenance.

Conflicts were moderately apparent in the Bender and Rush families. The nature of these conflicts were clearly characteristic of overinvolvement. Conflicts were related to the intensity of the relationships between the mothers and sons in these families. These relationships had the combination of the qualities of affection and exasperation.

To conclude this section of conflict defusing interactional patterns, it was impossible to investigate directly the nature of the

triadic relationships between the dropout students and their parents because of the absence of the fathers. The Adams family was the only family where the marriage was intact, but Mr. Adams was unable to attend the interview. During this interview, no evidence was provided which suggested that Sally functioned in the role of conflict defuser.

The families did provide interactional evidence which demonstrated, unequivocally, their low tolerance for open conflict and the inability to reach closure on issues. It was obvious when the researcher asked members in these six families to speak directly with each other about concerns, that direct dyadic interaction was alien to all of the families. Invariably, whenever members were asked to speak directly with each other, a system which opposed open conflict was maintained. Interactionally, topics of conversation changed dramatically and other members intruded. These and other diversions served to lower the stress in members and maintained an enmeshed system which could not tolerate open conflict between its members.

Additional data from the structural assessments. This section will highlight some of the trends which were observed in analyzing additional data from the structural assessments. These trends will be presented under the same headings used in the structural assessment.

Family's developmental stage. This study demonstrated the limitations of the current classification of family developmental stages. Although all of the families were launching young adults, only the Adams family could be classified legitimately as a family in the middle marriage stage of development. Because of this fact, it was difficult

to classify most of the families. What the researcher did under these circumstances was to indicate that if the spouses had remained married, the family would have been in the middle marriage stage. In some limited ways, this classification was appropriate because three of the families, the Johnson-Smiths, the Grays, and the Golds, were currently confronted with the effects of the aging or death of family members in an older generation; concerns of the middle marriage stage.

In many other ways, this middle marriage classification was inappropriate because of the reality that five of the families were single parent families. Developmentally, these families were dealing with issues and concerns that were idiosyncratic. For example, Mrs. Gold had begun to date and Mrs. Rush was planning to be married. In one of the other single parent families, the Benders, it was speculated that the family system had never developed interactional patterns appropriate for single parenthood. However, even with these limitations in the classification system, it was clear that the dropout students experienced stress leaving the family and that the family experienced stress with them gone. Additionally, several of the families exhibited a variety of other transitional stresses. How these families dealt with stress is the next assessment area to be reviewed.

Current life context - sources of support. The analysis of the structural assessments revealed that the primary source of support for most of the families was received from other family members. Although there is nothing wrong with family members supporting each

other, it can be problematic if the boundaries defining this process are diffuse. According to the structural family therapy model, Mrs. Gold's statement that she mothered Julie and that Julie mothered her, is a good example of an interactional pattern which represents an inappropriate style of support. Some of the consequences of such a peer-like supportive relationship were presented earlier in this section.

One of the other potential dangers of family members relying heavily on each other was demonstrated in the Adams family. Because there was a rigid boundary between the family and the outside world, the family would not know how to look adequately for or receive help from "outsiders" if the family support system became overloaded or "broke down".

The Johnson-Smith family differed from the other families in that they seemed to rely on outsiders more than on themselves. A psychologist had been involved with the family for the last 10 years and had provided help to several of the children. Steven's preparation for college was assisted by his coach with apparently little guidance from his family. This tendency to look to outsiders was most prevalent in this family even though two of the other families, the Golds and the Grays, had sought professional help for some of the stress in their lives.

Current life context - sources of stress. It was very evident that the five single parent families were experiencing stress additional to the launching of their adolescents. In both the Johnson-Smith family and the Gray family, there had been stress for the last

several years.

In the past six years, there had been a divorce, remarriage, and separation in the Johnson-Smith family. Three of the children had moved back and forth between the homes of their biological father and mother. Each of the children returned to their mother's home because of difficulties encountered living with their father and stepmother. Within the past year, Mrs. Smith had returned to school full time to obtain her R.N. degree. During this time, she was working full time as an L.P.N. When the researcher called to schedule the interview, Mrs. Smith indicated that she had not slept in the previous 40 hours. Also, an elderly aunt, who required some daily care, was living in the home. Mrs. Smith appeared overextended and overburdened.

Mrs. Gray was divorced four years ago after several years of separation. Apparently, her husband was a compulsive gambler and Mrs. Gray inferred that their marriage had been highly conflicted. Shortly after the divorce, her mother became ill with cancer and eventually died in their home after several months of Mrs. Gray's care. Shortly thereafter, Don and Beth acted out and became difficult for Mrs. Gray to manage. Within the past year, Mrs. Gray made the difficult decision to place her father in a nursing home. Even though it was speculated that the children's problems were functional in the context of the family, it was clear that there was stress in the family.

Although the Bender family seemed less stressed than the two previously mentioned families, it was evident that Mr. Bender's death had a powerfully negative impact on this family. It was suggested

that the family had never developed interactional patterns required of a single parent household. The level of income was another source of stress in this family, as it was in both the Johnson-Smiths and the Grays.

The other single parent families, the Rushes and the Golds, also had a history of conflicted marriages, but additional family stress developed shortly after Robert and Julie went away to college. During the fall semester, Mrs. Gold's mother died. Julie took a week off from classes to be at home, during this traumatic time. As the reader will recall, it was one week after Julie had been in divorce court with her mother that she decided to drop out of college. This fall, with both children being away at college, the death of Mrs. Gold's mother, and the divorce proceedings, it appeared that the members were leaving the family in ways which produced stress in its members.

The Rush family was another family which appeared to be disintegrating during the fall. As reported earlier, shortly after Robert left for college, his oldest sister left home. The week before Robert decided to drop out, Mrs. Rush announced her marital plans which included selling their home and moving to another state. There was also a lack of clarity about where and with whom Peg was going to live. Without question, a lot of stress occurred in the family shortly after Robert went away to college.

Both the researcher and the research assistant speculated that other stress existed in the Adams family, even though Mrs. Adams denied its existence. Even though there was uncertainty about other stress in

the family, it was obvious that Sally's leaving home was stressful for all members of the family.

In conclusion, the researcher was struck by the number of stressful events that happened before and after the majority of these students were in college. The next assessment area for review will focus on dropping out as a homeostatic phenomenon.

How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon? In the researcher's opinion, the most impressive and basic interactional evidence, which supported the conceptualization of dropping out as a homeostatic process, was the fact that none of the families attempted to search for alternatives to the students' decision of dropping out of college. This fact suggests systemic approval and support of the decision to return home. At a developmental stage when it is appropriate for families to modify interactional patterns, these family systems resisted change and were provided with a system maintenance phenomenon in the form of a family member dropping out of college. More explicitly, the family system influenced dropping out while simultaneously, dropping out influenced maintaining the system.

In an effort to be non-repetitive regarding the interactional patterns in these families, only a few of the many examples of dropping out as a homeostatic process will be highlighted. For example, in the families which demonstrated interactional patterns supporting over-closeness, systemic thinking would not suggest that domineering mothers caused several of the students to drop out. Rather, and to be specific,

the more Mrs. Bender and Mary infantilized Scott, the more age inappropriate behavior he demonstrated. This was a clear cyclical interaction as it could be initiated by any member. In the context of the family, dropping out was functional to the maintenance of this interactional pattern. Returning home was a homeostatic process as it maintained these preferred patterns of interaction and prevented change.

This same systemic logic can be applied to the theme of a heightened sense of loyalty among enmeshed families. For Steven Johnson to leave home and be competent at college, would mean abandoning the family myth that his life experiences were going to be similar to those of his parents and stepparents. To support this myth and maintain his loyalty, he dropped out after a few weeks to continue a relationship which had the potential of ending in divorce after an early marriage. The more Mrs. Smith assumed that Steven's life experiences were similar to the adult members of this family, the more Steven provided evidence to support this thinking.

In a similar fashion, Robert Rush's returning home enabled his mother to continue to see him as insecure and dependent. Central to their relationship was his mother's assumed expertise about Robert. Dropping out, in effect, maintained this interactional style.

There were speculations made by both the researcher and the research assistant that the Gray family "needed" problems to maintain their preferred interactional patterns. Clearly, with this speculation, dropping out was conceptualized as a negative feedback process.

one problematic member had the capacity to defuse stress in another problematic member, everyone in the system escalated to be the problematic stress defuser.

The last and less complex example of envisioning dropping out as a homeostatic process was provided by the Adams family. Sally Adams was in the position of preventing change in her nuclear family system as well as in the much larger extended family system. At an age when it was appropriate for a young adult to leave home, Sally was confronted with these systems' very powerful rules against leaving home. These rules applied to all family members in general, but to women in particular. It appeared that the attempt of the oldest child in this family to leave home was sabotaged subtly by her mother. Certainly, Sally did not challenge her mother, as Sally was very pessimistic about her ability to endure being away from home. Sally's inability to reach for assistance to help her stay, and the family's swift response to drive her home, suggested clearly that dropping out was maintained by the system as well as a system maintenance phenomenon. Her returning home helped rigidify several family systems that were threatened by change. Because these systems were unable to change at a developmental stage when change was appropriate, the Adams family's capacity for restructuring was seen as poor by both the researcher and the research assistant. A brief overview of the results of the families' capacity for restructuring follows.

Capacity for restructuring. As reported earlier in Chapter III, the analysis of this last assessment category was more speculative

since the interview emphasized joining and not restructuring the family system. However, the researcher was able to test all of the families' capacity for restructuring by either escalating stress and/or marking boundaries during the interview. In the opinion of this researcher, the interactional response to these methods of restructuring demonstrated the families' very limited capacity to change. Because of the swiftness by which the members interacted to maintain the preferred patterns of enmeshment, the researcher was pessimistic regarding any of the families' capacity for restructuring. This specific area of the structural assessment revealed the clearest differences in analysis between the researcher and the research assistant. An explanation for these differences is reported in the next section.

Similarities and differences in the structural assessments. This section includes a brief presentation of the similarities and a suggested explanation of the differences in the structural assessments completed by the researcher and the research assistant. The reader is reminded that the research assistant completed her structural assessment independently from the researcher and vice versa. The research assistant was unaware that the data analysis investigated enmeshment and conflict defusing interactional patterns.

Without question, the researcher's and the research assistant's structural assessments supported one another considerably. This is apparent readily in the structural maps of the interviewed family members which are shown in Figure 3. All of the maps showed the

Family	Assessment #1	Assessment #2	Assessment #3
JOHNSON-SMITH Mother = M Stepfather = F Steven = S	$S \equiv M \mid F$	$F \mid M \equiv S$	$F \mid M \equiv S$
ADAMS Mother = M Aunt J = A Uncle L = U Sally = S	$\begin{array}{ccccc} & \cdot & & & \\ M & \cdot & A & & U \\ & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \\ & S & & & \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{ccccc} & & & \cdot & \\ A & & U & \cdot & M \equiv S \\ & & & \cdot & \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{ccccc} & \cdot & & & \\ M & \cdot & A & & U \\ & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \\ & S & & & \end{array}$
RUSH Mother = M Robert = R Peg = P	$\begin{array}{ccccc} & & M & & \\ & \diagup & & \cdot & \cdot \\ R & & & \cdot & P \\ & & & \cdot & \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{ccccc} & & M & \equiv & R \\ & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot \\ & & P & & \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{ccccc} R & \equiv & & M & \\ & \diagdown & & \cdot & \\ R & & & \cdot & P \\ & & & \cdot & \end{array}$
GOLD Mother = M Julie = J	$M \equiv J$	$M \equiv J$	$M \equiv J$
GRAY Mother = M Don = D Beth = B	$B \equiv M \equiv D$	$B \equiv M \equiv D$	$B \equiv M \equiv D$
BENDER Mother = M Scott = S Mary = M ₁	$M \equiv S \equiv M_1$	$S \equiv M \equiv M_1$	$\begin{array}{ccccc} S & \equiv & M & \equiv & M_1 \\ & & & \diagdown & \diagup \\ & & & S & \end{array}$

Fig. 3. Structural maps of interviewed members.

families' boundaries as being diffuse, which is characteristic of enmeshment. Some differences were indicated in the hierarchy of the family, as the research assistant consistently placed all of the dropout students in the executive subsystem, whereas, the researcher showed Robert Rush and Scott Bender fluctuating between the sibling subsystem and the executive subsystem. Also, the researcher placed Sally Adams in the sibling subsystem, whereas, the research assistant placed her in the executive subsystem. As reported earlier, the researcher was of the opinion, that even though the boundaries in the family were diffuse, there was little interactional evidence suggesting that Sally was overinvolved in the executive subsystem.

Other areas which were supported by the researcher's and the research assistant's assessments were the families' developmental stage and the sources of support and stress. Although the researcher and the research assistant differed occasionally in their description of the homeostatic nature of the act of dropping out, all of the assessments postulated that dropping out prevented change by maintaining the families' preferred patterns of interaction.

It is appropriate to speculate here about the differences in the structural assessments. The differences were most apparent in the last area of assessment, the family's capacity for restructuring. The reader is reminded that this area of assessment involved more speculative judgements or hunches. It is suggested that the research assistant tended to be more optimistic about the capacity of the

dropout families to change because she works with highly disturbed families. It is the opinion of the researcher that, unintentionally, the research assistant may have compared the dropout families to families she sees in treatment. If this was the case, it would appear that dropping out of college was a concern of less severity than the concerns of the families whose adolescents were in residential treatment. This speculation may account for the differences in this area of assessment.

Finally, the intent of including the research assistant in the study was to provide a check on the researcher's structural assessments. Because there was no collaboration on any of the cases, it is very apparent that the researcher and the research assistant were as objective, as humanly possible, in this analysis of the interactional data. This chapter concludes with a description of the unanticipated findings.

Unanticipated findings. The researcher had speculated that the college dropout may have functioned in the capacity of a conflict defuser in his/her family. It was suspected that if the spouses were experiencing difficulties with their offspring away at college, one possible solution would be for the student to return home and continue to function as a conflict defuser. Clearly, this was not the situation with the studied families in this investigation. The researcher had not expected to see as many single parent families as were represented in this study.

As indicated in the delimitations of the study, the structural

assessment was the only method used in analyzing the data. However, the researcher was struck by the use of the paradoxical language in four of the families. For example, in the Adams family, when the researcher asked about how the decision was made to attend Springfield College, Mrs. Adams asserted, "I let her make her own decision where she wanted to go to college." Later in the interview, when Sally's decision to return home was being discussed, Mrs. Adams stated, "Ah, it was her decision alone, I know she was lonesome and I let her make her own decision." These statements suggest that it would be very difficult to know for sure if Sally was making a truly independent decision. Though Mrs. Adams denied having influenced Sally's decision to return home, it would appear that through her use of language she may have influenced her daughter in a very covert way.

This language style appeared also in the Gray family. Regarding Don's decision to attend college, Mrs. Gray reported, "I kind of let this be his decision." Later she maintained that she was "letting him become an adult in his own way." Once again it is impossible to make an independent decision if someone is letting you make that decision. Also, it is impossible to become an adult when someone is allowing that to happen. To follow what someone wants you to do, represents child like, dependent behavior.

The theme of becoming independent was central to much of the content of the interview with Julie and Mrs. Gold. In this family, the use of paradoxical language was more subtle, yet Mrs. Gold's instructions about how Julie could attain independence represented a

similar paradox as the ones indicated in the preceding cases.

The requests for spontaneous behavior were apparent also in the Bender family. Mrs. Bender stated, "I'm trying constantly to have him do his own thing." The point being made in all of these examples is the inability to behave spontaneously by following specific recommendations about how to be spontaneous. If a mother prescribes how a child should act in order to be more independent, and the child follows, the fact that the child follows represents dependent behavior.

An aspect of a particular form of paradoxical language, the double bind, appeared in the Bender family. Mrs. Bender indicated that she could influence Scott to stay in college. However, when she said she could tell him to stay, she asserted, "Know what's going to happen? Scott is, I feel Scott is lazy enough to stay. He would do it if I told him he had to." This comment placed Scott in a no win position. If Scott left college, he was bad, and if he stayed, he was still bad since he was staying for the wrong reasons. Only through further interviews would one be able to determine whether or not this language style was pervasive. In addition, further interviews would demonstrate the coping strategies which family members developed to deal with this form of paradoxical language.

When analyzing these examples of paradoxical language from the structural family therapy model, they were seen as styles of communication which functioned to leave transactions between members incomplete. For example, when Mrs. Bender was asked by the researcher to tell Scott to stay in college, she refused because she maintained that

she wanted to stop telling Scott what to do.

The ability to leave transactions incomplete by utilizing "confusing language" was offered in the Rush family. For example, when Mrs. Rush told Peg she was not grown up enough to discuss the specifics of her divorced parents' relationship, Mrs. Rush said, "Until she gets old enough to say I'd like to know what happened, and then if I want to tell her, fine and if I don't, it is none of her business." Though the researcher anticipated that if the dropout families were enmeshed, they would provide interactional data demonstrating difficulty completing transactions, however, the glaring examples of paradoxical and confusing language were unanticipated.

Another unanticipated finding of this study was the number of other stressful events that were occurring in these families, shortly before, or after the students left for college. The clearest examples were offered in the Rush and Gold families. During the seven weeks that Robert Rush was at college, his sister moved out of the house and moved in with a young man, who met with their mother's disapproval. More stressful was Mrs. Rush's announcement of her decision to remarry, sell their home, and move to another state. This occurred the week before Robert dropped out.

In the Gold family, Julie had spent a week at home during the fall semester because of her grandmother's death. The week before she decided to drop out, she accompanied her mother to divorce proceedings.

In the Johnson-Smith family, Mrs. Smith was overextended as she was working full time and going to school full time. Another child was

returning from Mr. Johnson's home because "things weren't working out." Two months before Scott Bender left for college, his oldest brother and sister returned home to live. Although this was probably a joyous occasion in the family, Scott's leaving may have been more stressful to this family since they had finally reunited after four years. A family which emphasized closeness, was losing a member at a time when they were all back together. It was clear that these families were confronted with a variety of other transitional concerns, in addition to the launching of an adolescent member.

To conclude, when the researcher began this investigation, he did not expect to see as many single parent families, to hear paradoxical language in four of the families, or to see as many families who, in addition to the launching of an adolescent, were dealing with a variety of other stressful developmental concerns.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate, by means of a structural assessment, the nature of the family system of first semester freshmen students who dropped out of Springfield College.

The college dropout has been the focus of numerous studies during the last 25 to 30 years. Traditionally, these efforts attempted to differentiate the persister from the dropout. This attempt, as reported in the review of the literature, has been met with very limited success. With the recent introduction of a systems perspective offered by family therapy theory, problematic behavior has come to be viewed in relationship to the context of the family. Conceptualizing the family as a system, it is theorized that problematic behavior does not rest within the intrapsychic domain, but in the interactional context of the family system. Viewing first semester freshmen college dropouts from a family systems perspective was the theoretical underpinning of this study. This study proposed that an investigation into the family system of dropout students might provide new understanding of this persistent phenomenon.

Six families were presented in separate case studies in this investigation. The interactional patterns, provided in a conjoint family interview, were the source of data which was analyzed. Immediately

following the interview, the researcher completed a structural assessment of the family. The structural assessment utilized the same assessment format developed by Salvador Minuchin, the originator of structural family therapy. After the researcher completed the first structural assessment, a research assistant developed an independent structural assessment based upon observations gained from viewing the videotaped interview. After the research assistant completed the second structural assessment, the researcher viewed the videotaped interview and independently completed the third structural assessment. The results of these assessments are highlighted in the conclusion section.

Conclusions

The analysis of the data revealed that the preferred patterns of interaction among all of the dropout families were characteristic of enmeshment. This analysis was supported in all of the structural assessments which were completed by the researcher and the research assistant. The structural assessments were consistent in their observations that the dropout families demonstrated a very limited range of interpersonal transactional styles. Repeatedly, family members interacted in ways which demonstrated their preference for an interactional style distinctive of enmeshment. Any attempts made by the researcher to challenge the enmeshed interactional patterns were quickly overruled by members of the family and the system was maintained.

Enmeshment was demonstrated by members speaking for each other, intruding into each other's conversations and speaking simultaneously. Frequently, family members spoke with assumed expertise about each other and a sense of similarity existed among members. In the service of family loyalty and closeness, members had difficulty differentiating themselves from their family as they sacrificed their own autonomy.

The nature of the triadic relationship between the dropout and his/her parents was virtually impossible to assess directly because of the absence of fathers in most of the families. In the one family where the spouse subsystem was intact, the husband was unable to get off from work to attend the interview. The remaining five families were single parent families, four as a result of either divorce or separation, and one as a result of the husband's death. The only father that was interviewed was Steven Johnson's stepfather, Mr. Smith. Even with the absence of husbands, some families offered interactional data which enabled the researcher to speculate about the existence of the conflict defusing interactional patterns of triangulation, parent-child coalition, and detouring.

The interviewed family members did demonstrate interactional patterns which indicated that they had a low tolerance for open conflict. This characteristic of enmeshment was shown as members had a difficult time completing dyadic transactions. It was difficult for members to speak to each other or to the researcher without activating other members to interrupt and intrude into the conversation. Dramatic and swift topic changes appeared as another style of keeping conflict

at a minimum. The inability to interact dyadically, coupled with the preference for keeping open conflict at minimal levels, appeared to impair the problem solving skills of these families. The families were limited in their desire and ability to develop other alternatives to the decision of dropping out of college.

Related to this impairment of problem solving skills was the skewed family hierarchy. Since the boundaries were diffuse, the drop-out students were able to function in the executive subsystem. Consequently the adult member of the family was unable to relate to their children in a manner which demonstrated appropriate parental power and authority. Conceptualized systemically, the reverse was true as these young adults were unable to look to their parent for effective guidance as the children had functioned as peers in the executive subsystem.

All of the structural assessments were consistent in the speculation that dropping out of college was simultaneously maintained by the family system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon. These families were at a developmental stage when it was appropriate to modify their interactional patterns. While these families' systems were resisting change, a family member dropped out of Springfield College and provided the necessary negative feedback to maintain the system's homeostasis. The families' preferred transactional patterns were influential in the students' decisions to drop out and the decisions to drop out were influential in the maintenance of these transactional patterns.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study has offered initial evidence regarding the value of conceptualizing first semester college dropouts from a family system perspective. The results of this investigation, as well as the unanticipated findings, are the source for the following recommendations for further research.

The initial, and most obvious, recommendation would be a replication of this study. Such replication would strengthen or refute some or all of the results of this study. A related investigation would be to investigate the family system of college dropouts regardless of the class level or the semester in which the decision was made.

To remain in the traditional direction of many years of attrition research, it is recommended that the family system of dropouts and persisters be investigated. Perhaps the inability to differentiate dropouts and persisters clearly in the past research efforts has occurred because all of the studies have only viewed individual characteristics of members of both groups. By expanding the site of the investigation to include the family systems of dropouts and persisters, results may demonstrate interactional patterns specific to both groups. If clear differences could be shown, the goal of differentiating dropouts and persisters would be achieved.

The implications of this study, if supported by further family interactional research such as the one previously suggested, could have a profound effect on college admission procedures. Admission officers could be trained to assess interactional patterns during a

family interview. Currently, at Springfield College, many prospective students are accompanied by their parents or parent for an interview, yet, the applicant is the only person interviewed. If further research supported this preliminary investigation, the families preferred patterns of interaction could be useful information regarding acceptance. The reader is reminded that four of the six interviewed students planned to live at home and attend college closer to their home. It would appear to be to the families', the students', and the colleges' advantage to be able to use family interactional patterns as a criterion for admissions if they proved to be reliable predictors of dropout behavior.

One of the unanticipated findings of this investigation was that five of the six researched families were single parent families. This fact showed dramatically the limitations of the current stages used in describing the family developmental life cycle. Because the number of single parent families is increasing, the development of a single parent family life cycle is needed. Such a model could describe stages and appropriate developmental tasks that were specific to single parent families. Included within this framework could be specifics related to the cause of single parenthood, for example divorce or death, as well as the context of when it happened. Clearly, the developmental tasks of a single parent household with young children differs from a single parent household with adolescents.

Also, in relationship to single parenthood, is the question regarding the launching of young adults from this family constellation.

This investigation provided interactional evidence which indicated that the dropout student and the single parent, in these cases all mothers, were overinvolved with one another. It was speculated that dropping out was a way to ensure that this overinvolvement would be maintained. All of the dropout students seemed to have functioned in a helpful and supportive way with their mothers. As all of these women were dealing with other stresses beyond the launching of their adolescents, the students seemed willing to modify their own autonomy to continue to be supporters of their mothers. For example, the Bender family, as a whole, appeared to have never adapted successfully to interactional patterns needed in a single parent household. Scott's dropping out would maintain interactional patterns appropriate for a young adolescent. His willingness to interact at a younger developmental stage ensured that members would interact with him in a manner which prevented the whole family from changing. This investigation suggests that single parent families may have idiosyncratic difficulties launching adolescents to college. With the increase in the number of single parent families, it is obvious that more young adults who have had this experience will be attending college. Further interactional research which investigates the launching of young adults from single parent families is suggested.

The use of paradoxical language in the dropout families in this investigation was another unanticipated finding. Since five of the families gave evidence of some similar language styles, it appears that an investigation which focuses on the nature of the language in

dropout families would be valuable. Another possible study would be to investigate the differences between the language styles of dropout families and persister families.

Since the results of this investigation provided interactional data which supported conceptualizing dropping out as a homeostatic phenomenon, the writer suggests research in treating dropout families. This research project has caused the researcher to begin to think about the implementation of a program of family therapy with the families of potential college dropouts. It is speculated that if families were willing to attend sessions at the college, systemic change could be achieved which would enable the student to continue his/her education. It is further speculated that the results of such research would be dramatically different from those recently reported by Strean (1979). After treating college dropouts, he reported:

From our research on fifty cases, it became quite clear that the intellectually capable college student who drops out is typically a very immature person, narcissistic, egocentric, passive, and with many grandiose and omnipotent fantasies. Because he has been catered to and indulged, college with its requirements for study, hard work, frustration, and some submission induces a psychological shock. With many of his infantile wishes not gratified, the dropout becomes depressed and resorts to excessive fantasy and other regressive behavior (pp. 212-213).

Finally, it is the opinion of this researcher that conceptualizing the problems of college students from a family systems perspective is foreign to the vast majority of directors and counselors at college and university counseling centers. This researcher has been impressed with the positive results achieved by using the structural family therapy model with college students and their families at the

Springfield College Counseling Center. Several students, whose "symptoms" would have previously merited a medical withdrawal from college, have remained on campus and functioned very successfully after family treatment. It is the opinion of this writer that it would be an asset to train current and future counseling center personnel in the theory and practice of structural family therapy.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Structural Assessment

1. Establishing the interview.
2. Description of the family.
- 3a. Structural map of interviewed members.*
- 3b. Hypothesized map of the family based on interview data.

* Key to structural map:

- - - - - clear boundary

. diffuse boundary

_____ rigid boundary

===== affiliation

===== overinvolvement

— || — conflict

} coalition

→ detouring

4. Family's developmental stage.

Courtship

Early marriage

Early childbearing

Children starting school

Middle marriage

Retirement

5a. Current life context - sources of support.

5b. Current life context - sources of stress.

6. How was dropping out of college maintained by the system as well as being a system maintenance phenomenon?

7. Capacity for restructuring.

APPENDIX B
SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE
OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS

WITHDRAWAL PROCEDURE

Please complete the "Exit Interview Questionnaire" and schedule an appointment with the Dean of Students or one of his Assistants. Be sure to bring the completed Questionnaire to the Exit Interview.

After an "exit interview" with the Dean or one of his Assistants, please complete the following and then return to the Dean of Students Office to be officially withdrawn from Springfield College.

1. The Housing Office should be informed immediately if you live on campus or in College-owned housing off-campus.
 2. The Resident Director should be informed and dormitory keys returned. Be sure to clean your room and take all personal belongings.
 3. If you are receiving financial assistance, the Financial Aid Office should be informed immediately.
 4. Inform your academic advisor.
 5. Instructors and professors should be informed if you are leaving while a term is in progress.
 6. Make payment of any outstanding bills to Springfield College and clear your account with the Business Office. Please read the statement found in the "Student Handbook" for information regarding refunds and leaving the College.
 7. Any material on loan from the Library should be returned.
 8. Any athletic equipment, lock (\$5.00 deposit will be returned) or towel belonging to Springfield College should be returned to the Athletic Equipment Room.
 9. Turn in your meal ticket to the Office of the Dean of Students if you are leaving while a term is in progress.
 10. Turn in your student ID card to the Office of the Dean of Students.
-

Upon completion of the above, and when you turn in your student ID card, a Withdrawal form will be filled out and signed by the Dean of Students. A copy of this form is then filed with the Business Office, Registrar and other appropriate offices will be notified. If you want transcripts sent to other institutions because you are applying to them as a transfer student, you must request this in the Registrar's Office.

Note: If after withdrawing from the College you find you would like to return, you must re-apply by notifying the Admissions Office if you have not been a registered student for more than one term. If you have only missed one term, you must obtain a "permit to register" from the Dean of Students.

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APPENDIX C

Letter of Consent

We agree to participate in a research project which involves interviewing available family members of freshmen students that drop out of Springfield College. The interview will be videotaped and erased after analysis. Families will be guaranteed anonymity in the written dissertation.
